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I Love My Doctor

Evelyn Barkins loves her doctor all right. She married him. And taking on a doctor is like taking on any other husband—only more so. Out of the throes of being a bride still at law school, and having a husband just completing his hospital internship and trying to start a medical practice, comes this delightfully unconventional story of a very conventional marriage.

In the first place the general family reaction was hard to cope with; "You're too young" and "What do you expect to live on?" were questions difficult to parry, since Evelyn was so young she had to show her birth certificate to get the license and John hadn't begun to practice. Then too it wasn't just the problem of finding any apartment. It had to be an office as well. And if the neighborhood could afford the doctor, the doctor couldn't afford the neighborhood.

EVELYN BARKINS



I Love My Doctor



Illustrated by Alfred S. Piene

Thomas Y. Crowell Company
NEW YORK

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To My Husband:
The Inexhaustible Source Book
for my Unscientific Research

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*She [my wife] is my goods,
my chattels; she is my house,
My household stuff, my field, my barn,
My horse, my ox, my ass,
my anything . . .*

—SHAKESPEARE

I Love My Doctor

CHAPTER ONE



The Birth of a Nation

*The men may talk of beer,
And girls who bring them cheer,
And even then it's never straight or true;
But when it comes to weddin',
You can bet your brand new beddin',
You'd better get a woman's point of view.*

—with apologies to Kipling's "Gunga Din"

Marriage, like all Gaul, has been divided by the modern sages into the economic, the social, and the physical. It has become a science to be gruesomely dissected with the aid of biological charts, meticulous graphs, and a whole series of brand new institutions elegantly called anything from the Better Marriage Clinic to the Matrimonial Adviser; until the thoughtful and literate young couple begin to feel as if they were contracting for a hazardous rocket ship to the moon, instead of a wedding license.

Divorce statistics are flung in their faces. Anxious relatives pontifically prophesy: "It will never last." Astigmatic parents ask: "What does he possibly see in her anyway?" The economists act as if never before in history was a young man faced with the problem of supporting a wife; while those on the physical side of the fence

(meaning everybody else), seem to completely forget that Adam and Eve on a bite of apple and common sense, scored a home run without any aid from Marie Stopes at all!

Is it any wonder, therefore, that the modern bachelor feels as if he should be awarded the Congressional Medal for having escaped capture to date through his valiant resistance to the enemy? Or that the average young couple start out in married life like a batter with society's two strikes against him from the first? Or that marriage, which should be the most natural, most beautiful and happy relationship in the world, has become the most scientific and the most arbitrary, the subject of solemn debate and the object of anyone's bad jokes?

Even my mother had obviously read the latest handwriting on the wall. "Marriage," she told me when first she discovered that John and I were so bent, "is a very serious business."

My friends, too, vicariously thrilled as they were, remained practical enough to ask: "But, darling, how can you possibly be sure?" forgetting, apparently, that nothing these days is sure, except the well-known death and taxes, and even then, one never knows how soon and how much.

While my Aunt Hilda, whose emotional life had never progressed beyond the confines of her goldfish tank, said rather embarrassed, but with the air of a president of a Boston Uplift Society in the line of duty, "Here are some books I bought for you on marriage. The clerk said they were very instructive." As if a happy marriage could be built like a new slip cover for a bedroom chair, from a set of directions in a ladies' magazine.

But what bothers me most about all marriage generally is the fact that, completely lost in the flotsam of intellectual gossip and Reno recordings, are the many unimportant young couples like John and me, who meet in the traditional boy-meets-girl fashion, marry on little but love, and live happily ever after without the help of the police department or the Supreme Court.

Recently, after a radio broadcast in connection with my last book,

one well-known woman celebrity whose discarded spouses could have formed their own hockey team, said to me: "That's a nice husband you have there. Are you planning to hold on to him long?"

Startled, I looked up. "Hold on to him long?" I repeated. Then I caught on, and with remarkable restraint, managed a smile. "Oh," I answered, "of course."

Her attitude shocked me. I certainly had never thought of marriage like a fur coat to be discarded or worn at will, from season to season; but even I had read enough best sellers to recognize in her fashionable statement the modern *décor*. Nowadays, husbands are changed as casually and regularly as a man changes his socks.

"You dear thing," she went on as I remained silent, and how grateful I was that she could not envision the inner working of the "dear thing's" mind. "Congratulations. I can see you have a successful marriage."

Again I smiled, and again I seethed. Whenever people comment on my so-called "successful marriage," I feel as if I have been awarded first prize for solving a hundred-thousand-piece jig-saw puzzle, with two thousand parts missing. And yet this term, too, I recognized as the epitome of what is wrong with the modern design.

Marriage is no longer merely a private affair. It has been added to the list of public concerns along with the national debt and unemployment insurance. Innumerable, sociological treatises are on the market, offering to guarantee by ninety-nine do's and don't's, successful matrimony for \$2.25, and 150 pages. Textbooks on married love that often look like an elementary course in biological reproduction and whose writers seem to assume that the genitalia are never discovered until their books are read, are gobbled up by Freudian frightened individuals who have been made to feel that they dare not approach the bridal night without a course in sexology.

And so, gradually, from King Solomon to Mr. Anthony, marriage has slowly changed from a wonderful loving art to a scientific,

laborious duty. And we wonder why, when the psychiatrists are finally through with us, we have been condemnably branded a generation of psychoneurotics!

Considering all this fanfare, however, it was a marvelous surprise to find that being married was lots of fun. I made this remarkable observation from the very beginning, and I didn't mean just sex either, although everyone else smiled slyly and knew better. Not that there was anything wrong with that. Heaven knows, as John always reminds me, that sex is not exactly a passing fad; and vital statistics definitely prove it's here to stay. But discussing sex and all its conglomerations (a national hobby), is as futile as trying to decide which came first, the chicken or the egg, although much more intriguing. Especially so, from the point of view of a young female with one foot in the marriage bed and the other on a cloud.

Before my marriage, there had been good reason for alarm. Judging from all the undercover talk I had ever heard, I had finally come to fear that being married consisted simply of going to bed with a man, coming out with him for meals, and hopping back in again.

The unattached girls giggled and whispered: "You know how the fellows are," and obviously, everyone did.

The wiser, but still comparatively immature matrons, breathed, "My dear, you've no idea what passion really is!" and sighed appreciatively.

While my mother, on appropriate occasions, announced with portentous emphasis: "Men are nothing but animals."

Is it any wonder I worried?

But, as I told John after we were married, "For heaven's sake, darling, don't people make such a big fuss about such a little matter?"

To which he replied facetiously: "What did you expect? An atomic explosion?"

As for our wedding itself, it was inauspicious, complying more with the dictionary definition, rather than the social one. This was

true, mostly, because nobody concerned thought we should get married anyway. I was too young (and still in school); John was too poor (intern's pay was fifteen dollars per month, plus room, board and uniforms).

Everybody, but John and me, agreed it would be far more sensible to wait.

"What for?" asked John, "and why?"

"Well," said my mother, carefully looking away, "It's all right for just the two of you. But what if—er—certain accidents happen?"

But John was unmoved. "You forget," he said seriously, "that I am a doctor," speaking pompously as if he were announcing the divine right of kings. Heaven knows that in all the world there is no one more self-consciously The Doctor, than the brand new one.

But my mother sniffed. "And you forget," she reminded him ominously, "that you are also a man."

I looked apprehensively at John, for hadn't my mother often said what men were?

But my father, who never let my mother stand alone, if he could help it, spoke too.

"What will you live on, young man?" he began, and much more. Soon it was all there: love won't buy bread; romance won't pay the rent; *and* how will you support my daughter in the style to which she has been accustomed?

Anxiously, John and I outlined our plans. In a few weeks he would have completed his hospital internship. Meanwhile, we would live in a furnished room, then find a small apartment, open an office and start growing rich. While John would treat patients and augment the family income, I would finish up my law course (it was only two school hours each morning), help him with the nursing and secretarial work, and eventually hang out my own shingle and contribute another large portion to our mutual wealth. It was really very simple.

"See?" we finished hopefully, as if surely such logic could not fail.

But it did. "I can only see," my mother answered angrily, as if there were brass knuckles on her tongue, "that you two are beyond making any sense. Let's discuss this at another time, when you may be more reasonable."

So we discussed it again and again and again, until to break the deadlock and attain our goal, John and I decided to elope to city hall.

Thus finally, love came through: Romeo and Juliet, Tristan and Isolde, Claudia and David, and—hallelujah!—John and I.

Everything went nice and amusingly wrong from the start. When we went to get our marriage license, the clerk refused my application because I was under twenty-one.

"What should we do now?" we asked him in dismay, dreading a change in plan.

"Get a birth certificate or a note from your doctor testifying as to your date of birth," he recited by rote, completely oblivious of our plight, and more as if he were ordering: ham sandwich on rye, hold the pickle, no mustard.

"Oh, John," I wailed as we walked away, "Now what?"

"Got a certificate home?" he asked.

I shook my head.

"Well, then who is your family doctor?" he asked again, stopping suddenly in the doorway.

"Out of the city," I answered. My mother always regarded our ability to understand each other's unmatching questions and answers as a sure sign of marital insanity, but John always called it perfect compatibility.

For a long while, three whole minutes, we stood blocking the traffic of other eager aspirants, while reviewing our situation like two four-star generals carefully considering an unexpected change in enemy plans.

Inspiration landed with a loud "Oh."

"Yes?" said John impatiently.

"I've really got it," I said, starting to laugh. "You're a doctor, John. You write me a note as to my date of birth on your prescription blank and sign it. Then we'll give it to the clerk and get the license."

John refused outright. Why are men usually so much more finicky than women?

"It's illegal," was his contention.

Finally, though, goaded on by the gravity of the situation (with months to spare we had naturally waited until our wedding day itself for this trip to the license bureau), and encouraged by my earnest assurance that the clerk would be as unaware of what we were doing as an elephant of a fly on its back, and besides, "everything in the note will be true anyway," John agreed to try it.

The note written, we reapproached the desk. Without a glance or a word (we could have worn gas masks for all he looked or cared), the clerk handed us the license. It occurred to me, as we hurriedly left the room lest he reconsider, that the poor man was so obviously bored—his job undoubtedly—and so sleepy—his wife probably—that he would have granted a license to a cat and a canary if they could merely have filled out the prerequisite forms. To this day, however, John tells our children that he got me by fraud and for some incomprehensible reason, it makes him the Great Lover, and all of them happy, seeming to impart a dashing Lothario flavor to an otherwise conventional affair.

The wedding ceremony itself, which followed immediately like the check before the dessert routine in Max's Busybee during lunch hour, was distinctly unimpressive. There was nothing religious or beautiful about it. The office we stood in was dark and bare, and smelled like a coat closet full of wet umbrellas, and dirty clothes. The witnesses, brought in out of the hall, were two dark shadows behind me. The justice himself was a short, queer-looking man, with a round shiny bald spot right in the middle of his head that reflected the electric light above him as does a shimmering pool

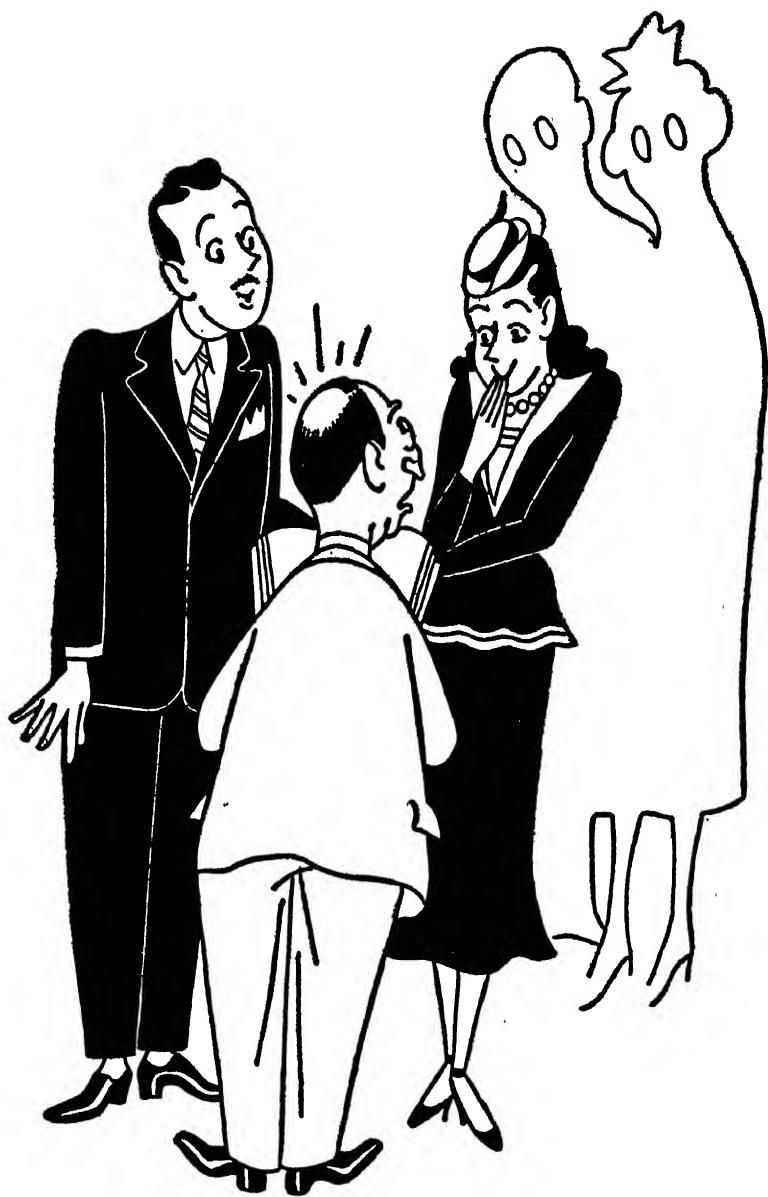
of water. He stammered just enough to be funny, and I giggled.

"This is s-serious, young lady," I was immediately told, so I giggled some more until John pinched my hand and made me stop.

As the little man began to read, though, I grew solemnly still. The seriousness of the situation overwhelmed me, and just as I was becoming thoroughly frightened, it began to seem unreal instead. It did not appear to be possible that a few words read out of a little, black book by a homely, strange person could actually create the relationship of husband and wife. And indeed, as I now realize, it doesn't. Sometimes I think much too much stress is laid on the wedding ceremony itself nowadays, as if, according to Hollywood, that's all there is to it. Not that any young girl doesn't like a big show and plenty of trimmings. Even Gravel Gertie looked good in white. But a wedding ceremony as such is really nothing more than a label on a can, and has no real significance until and unless the contents correspond to the description. It's like a driver's permit to operate a car: it says you may but it doesn't mean you can.

For a long moment, I was terrified. This was my wedding. This was for keeps, forever. Tomorrow there was no going back to today, no turning away. I knew that I loved John and that he loved me. But who could tell? Life was something tremendous and terrible before me, indefinable, unyielding and frightening. How could anyone know anything for sure? And this was marriage! All the calculated warnings I had heard, all the literary admonitions I had read came home to roost with shattering effects. It was like standing at the edge of a deep pool for the first time, and wanting with all your heart to dive in, but held back by fear. The water looks black and bottomless. Your legs refuse to jump, until all at once, a push, a loss of balance, and in you go, ashamed of the faltering before.

Suddenly, I felt the ring on my finger, and we were married. John, in the meantime, had contributed his own piece of individuality to the event. Three times, during the ceremony, whenever the little



man paused for breath, John turned and kissed me. "Sorry," he muttered when reproached, "I thought it was all over."

"A v-very unusual w-wedding," the justice said with apparent displeasure, as he pocketed his fee; "that's the trouble with folks today. Don't anybody realize what marriage means any more," imparting to that battered institution by his own tone of voice the zealous solemnity of the Salvation Army and the finality of Grant's Tomb. Indeed, he wished us luck so perfunctorily, that it was obvious he thought it a waste of time, but a necessary formality anyway. No one could ever say he didn't know what marriage meant!

With a final burst of laughter, in which even John joined, we said good by and left.

John and I had no honeymoon at all in the usual sense. That is, we didn't retreat to some backwash hotel to ruminate on marriage, or whatever it is that people do on technical honeymoons. Of course, we might have managed a genuine five carat excursion by hook, without actual crook, but circumstances, a word I have come to dread, prevented that. John asked me once or twice if I minded the lack of traditional fuss and feathers.

"If it means very much to you, darling," he said, "we'll borrow other money for office furnishings, and use our scant reserves and wedding presents for that."

But I refused, since it certainly wasn't that important. In fact, it all seemed to depend on the point of view involved, like everything else in life, I guess. My girl friends, when they heard, appeared to think that any kind of elopement was "so terribly romantic."

My mother, after I told her my account of the wedding, wept aloud and said over and over again, "My poor, poor child," as if I had confided that I had married a homosexual or an ex-convict.

But my father, speaking from a totally different side of the fence, said: "You ought to be glad you didn't have all that camouflage. As if all marriage weren't purely biological anyhow, with people tying white satin ribbons on to hide it!"

Personally, while I must confess that there was a time when a

wedding without the customary glamour and fanfare would have been tantamount to me to sleeping with a man without his wedding ring, it no longer seemed very significant.

Besides, if we had no dressing, we certainly had the turkey. We stayed at a near-by small hotel for most of the summer until John finished his internship and we found a place to live, but our room, Number 518, was all the honeymoon a girl could want. Of course, as hotel rooms ordinarily go, it was probably as common as orange juice and toast for breakfast. But since I had never been in a hotel room before, my mind must have been subconsciously harboring something out of the Waldorf Astoria or the motion picture set of *Anthony and Cleopatra*, for, at first glance, I was somewhat disappointed. The plain wooden bed, the scratched, anemic looking dresser, the thin, straight rheumatic chair were all of them no balm to my romantic spirit. I looked in vain for M.G.M.'s satin tufted bed, fat stuffed chairs and thick rugs; or, if not that, for the broken chest, the iron bed, and the electric sign flashing on and off outside the back window like in *Whistle Stop*. Instead the room looked as familiar and unexciting as my Aunt Hilda's second best bedroom, if not as clean.

I turned to John expecting to share my disappointment, only to note with surprise that he had never even noticed the room at all. His eyes were on me, his hand was in mine, and it didn't take me long to realize that while clothes may make the man, furniture certainly doesn't make the honeymoon.

My mother, naturally, had offered us the opportunity to share the family bed and board, until we secured our own apartment.

"It'll save us hotel money," I told John when I repeated the invitation, "and we can probably chisel in on some food as well."

"But?" asked John, as if I hadn't finished.

For a minute or two I hesitated. It is difficult in any marriage to be completely honest at all times; in early marriage, it is doubly so. The emotion is like a blindfold across the eyes; the shadowy, unknown places in each other's characters loom like big, black dan-

gerous craters. And yet I have always been grateful that John and I instinctively chose the direct route.

Perhaps, at times, it might have been more romantic had John not interrupted a tender scene with the logical explanation that his arm was getting cramped; perhaps it would have been temporarily more glamorous had I jumped out of bed at the stroke of dawn to beautify my face, but it certainly would have made for a sad awakening later on.

Therefore, when John correctly interpreted my reluctance about staying at my folks', I explained without further hesitation.

"It's this way darling," I said. "Despite all their best intentions, we'll have as much privacy as an office clock near closing time. And legal or not, it'll still be like having a man in my bedroom, and I couldn't feel comfortable with the family probably wondering what was going on. And besides," I finished, "since we aren't having a real honeymoon, I want us to be alone, at least, like this."

John sighed with relief and gave me a tremendous hug. "And I was afraid you might want to go," he laughed. "But who wants to be economically sensible?"

So we sent our thanks home, and kept ourselves in 518.

But being married, even thus privately married, felt funny: the intimacy, the close relationship, the understanding. It was all barriers down, and no holds barred.

"Now who would ever guess," I told John one day as I watched him shave, "that a black-haired man like you could grow a yellow mustache!"

John swung his razor blade at me in mock alarm. "Don't you ever tell a soul," he threatened, but I could see a seriousness beneath his comic stance.

"Not a soul," I promised and never did until now.

He found out many things about me: that I never sew slip straps when they break but use safety pins; that I have to sleep with curlers in my hair unless I have a fresh permanent; and that I always go to bed with an apple.

In common with all other newlyweds, I suppose, we reviewed our personal history from first meeting onward. It seemed to us, as is the case with thousands of other couples (and it still does), one of God's major miracles that we met at all, and that out of all the teeming millions of people in the world we found each other.

"Do you remember," John asked, "how the first time we met, we danced, and I told you that I wasn't much of a dancer?"

"And you still aren't," I answered.

The record of our wondrous achievement never failed to astound us, if us only. After seven momentous meetings, we could no longer resist the tide.

"Remember my proposal?" John asked.

"Do I? That's one for the next generation," I laughed.

One evening, our seventh date, John had told me that he had had a dream that he and I were married.

Not wanting to appear overanxious, I had answered: "I'll bet you were glad when you woke up and found it wasn't real."

"Nope," John had said drawing me close, "it was a horrible disappointment."

From there on in, the path was straight ahead, and our eight months' period of engagement had been a sop to family argument, professional convenience, and general convention.

All in all, we lived our honeymoon days in a kind of complete, communal solitude, despite the many people we encountered and conversed with. Sometimes, I honestly feel that most newlyweds deserve absolute surcease of all relatives and friends for one whole private year. Much incipient mother-in-law trouble, too, if you ask me, is directly traceable to those early months when Mama is trying to make herself heard above daughter's thorough absorption in her new world, and seeming indifference to the old; although it should be obvious to anyone that there is usually such a visible haze about the chosen couple, that trying to make real live contact with them is harder than trying to get the Statue of Liberty to sing.

John and I were no different. Not that we punctuated every sen-

tence with a kiss, or went around looking like Election Day's chief drunk on a super bender. Not, as I am also very pleased to report, that we had a favorite "Our Song" which almost caused convulsions every time we heard it, or that we talked only in amorous code to each other.

It was just that we were basically unaware of everything and everyone but ourselves, although having been well trained, we both went through the proper social motions. Winston Churchill could have opened a shooting gallery right next door, or Haile Selassie could have been pitching for the Dodgers that season, and we wouldn't have heard or cared.

Everything was new and exciting and different and wonderful. After a lifetime of broadcloth pajamas and flannels, I was suddenly immersed in trousseau satin and lace. The trailing robes, the flimsy nightgowns all went to my head. I felt like the star of an amateur theatrical in hired clothes. Indeed, the very next day after we were married, I sat John down and tried on one item after another for our mutual admiration until his exaggerated responses assured me that he too was convinced.

Whenever we lolled and talked and laughed into the late early morning hours, I expected at any moment to hear my mother's voice calling from her bedroom, like a town crier in a medieval village: "It's one o'clock, dear. You'd better tell John to go home. Work tomorrow!"

How very much we talked! We told each other "everything," from the time I accidentally wet my pants in first grade to the night John tremblingly treated his first emergency case at the hospital.

"It was nothing but a foreign body in the eye," he laughed, "a mere speck. But I behaved as if a Department of Sanitation truck had fallen in, garbage and all, and I was expected to perform an immediate amputation with a penknife. By the time I calmed down, the nurse had gotten it out of the patient's eye and sent him home."

How solemnly we spoke, and how seriously we resolved. We would never become like so many other husbands and wives. Heaven

forbid! Bored with each other, eating in silence, living in anger, arguing like mortal enemies! How shocked we would have been, and outraged, to be told that that too had been said before.

How we laughed at everything that happened. There was the time when John was looking for me in the lobby, and the elevator man said: "Want your wife, sir?" and John, taken by surprise forgot and gulped: "My—what?"

From then on, it was a toss up among the hotel staff as to whether we were newlyweds or just plain having an affair.

The thought of living in sin, especially when I wasn't, intrigued me, and I would have encouraged the idea had not John's dire threats deterred me. That was the first time I encountered his professional dignity. Not that I really minded either if people knew we were newlyweds, only what on earth does one say when someone asks, as they always do with a knowing smile: "Well, well! And how do you like married life?"—married life, in the honeymoon stage, definitely referring only to cohabitation?

And yet, in another way, we felt as if we had always been married. It was thrilling to belong like this together, to do things together, and to always go everywhere together.

"I feel as if it's been this way forever," I told John one night as we prepared for bed. "Isn't it fun?"

"It is and so do I," he answered with a mouthful of toothpaste and water.

"And talk of being tied down," I scoffed. "Why, people are crazy! I'm freer than a hobo on a train." And I was.

To this day, I am always puzzled by the proverbial ball and chain talk. For me, marriage has always seemed the ultimate in liberty, like a convict in his first walk out of Alcatraz. Not that home life had been imprisonment by any means, but, on the other hand, neither had it been like this. No more "Hang your clothes up at night" talk. No more: "Be home at twelve dear, or what will the neighbors think?" No more, "Turn off your light. That's enough reading for now." No more anything.

Marriage was emancipation, a rising to full, mature citizenship in a new democracy. All the old rules and regulations were automatically suspended, and the only ones left were the few carefully chosen and deliberately instituted by John and me, plus of course the primary marital one of amatory consistency. But, as John often pointed out, if a man or woman minds that, then he certainly should never have married in the first place.

The latitude was great. If John ever even noticed my best dress in a heap on the chair, I'm sure he never cared. If we decided to come home at three A.M. or not at all, who was to object? If we chose pickles and ice cream and frankfurters (my favorite dinner) four times a week, it was strictly a matter between John and me and our stomachs. Indeed the liberty allowed the average married couple is equal to anything on earth outside of out-and-out assault and battery against each other, or other types of crimes against the state like incest or murder.

And besides in those cases where objectionable conduct arises within the marriage itself, there is a world of difference between John's, "Please, sweetheart, don't do that now," and my mother's stern, "Young lady, you're staying home the rest of the week." As for actual reconciliations after a quarrel, no parent holds a candle to a husband, unfair though it may be.

Even that early in our marriage, I said all this to John that night, and even then he agreed.

"And darling," I went on dreamily, watching him wash up, "the modern books are ridiculous to always conclude novels with the wedding, as if that were the end instead of the beginning of everything."

"You bet," John said from the depths of a towel. "Happily ever after doesn't half say it."

Finally he got into bed too and turned off the light. In the quiet darkness I could hear his even breathing, and the loud ticking of our wedding alarm clock on the near-by table, and the distant rumbling of a truck in the street below. I stretched comfortably

and thought of the rapidity with which I believed we had settled into all of married life. Incredible the routines we had already formed: like turning all in one unit in our sleep; like distributing the little tasks so that I fixed the bed and John opened the windows; like learning, even in our tiny quarters, to live without undue bother or fuss.

"Darling," I told John blissfully from the shallow depths of a happy honeymoon, "isn't marriage wonderful? It always will be just like this, won't it?"

"It will," said John firmly, "just like this."

And, as he drew me close for further answer, I am sure it was just as well that neither of us knew any better.

CHAPTER TWO



Blessed Are the Poor

*Now we've found a place to sleep,
I pray the Lord our house to keep
Free from sudden raise in rent,
Busted pipes, and discontent;
Rich in laughter, love, and hope,
Like a balanced gyroscope.*

Amen!

—with apologies to
The New England Primer

The first insidious change that marked our marital progress, however, began almost immediately with our search for a place to live. History, of course, flowed calmly onward, completely undisturbed by us or any other single couple's catastrophic events. With unbelievable contempt, it records inaugural processions, presidential successions, and war and peace, while totally ignoring the day Henry proposed to Anna, or the time Uncle Hiram accidentally burned down the barn. But in true love-conquers-all fashion, John and I kept our own egotistical reckoning in which we, in turn, abandoned the Roosevelt administration for one of our own. High at the top of world shaking occasions we wrote: "Wedding Day," and under-

neath, in only very slightly smaller print we inscribed: "The time we found our home."

Unfortunately, even in those prehistoric years when apartments were not quite so hard to find as polar bears in Times Square, house hunting was still a tough problem.

"Must we?" I asked John half-seriously, half jokingly, when first the call to duty resounded through Room 518 like reveille in an army camp, and we launched our original discussion: "I'm having a wonderful time right here."

"So am I," said John, "but two weeks are up already. In a few more, I'll be finished at the hospital, and we have to be all ready to start our practice and begin making some money. And before you know it, you'll be back at law school."

"I guess you're right," I admitted reluctantly. "Everything has seemed so far away, that I've almost forgotten. Well," I finished, sighing dramatically for the world that is too much with all of us, "what do we do?"

"Find a place to live," he answered immediately, as if he were filling in a prescription blank. Then he laughed. "Not that it won't be hard! We need four rooms at least to accommodate both home and office, but we can only afford two. We want a decent, middle-class neighborhood where the people can manage medical care, but we can only pay for a poor one. And if we do find a nice apartment, then we have to make sure that the price and location check too. Otherwise," he ended cheerfully, "it's as easy as solving a simultaneous quadratic equation with four unknowns."

With these immortal words, we started. Whenever John was off duty from the hospital (the grindstone having called for him the week before), we hunted. We walked upstairs and downstairs and in our lady's chamber to no avail. If the rental price was fine, then the location wasn't; if the neighborhood checked, then nothing else did.

"There's always something," I told John mournfully one night,

as I lay on the bed resting my aching feet up in the air, a curative beyond John's mere medical comprehension.

"I know," he answered. "Like ants on a picnic or thorns on a rose—"

"And blisters on a hike," I finished the trilogy pointedly.

By this time, after almost two weeks of intensive looking, I was on familiar terms with most of the building superintendents within a five-square-mile radius, knew their favorite brands of beer and troubles, but little else.

"Lady," said one of them that very day when I had wandered into his territory again while making my usual rounds, "if you could only pay a higher price, I know where you can get a beauty of a place. On Linwood Street South."

"And that's exactly it," I said to John, after repeating my accounting that night, "if we could pay a higher price, we'd have no trouble at all."

That much was certainly true. It is all very well for us Americans as a nation to theoretically traditionalize contempt for material things. Poor but honest sounds magnificent, and perhaps money is the root of all evil and surely isn't everything, but there comes a time in most young couples' lives when it seems like it is. Maybe Hollywood is right, John and I agreed. Maybe the poor little rich girl does nothing but weep; and maybe the millionaire is never happy until he meets the penniless stenographer who teaches him to do the jitterbug and sing, but did Samuel Goldwyn ever try to find a four-room apartment that costs like two and looks like five?

"Don't worry, darling," John consoled me as, womanlike, I complained the loudest, "maybe you'll find something tomorrow; and if not, we've still got a whole week in which to look. Besides, tomorrow's Saturday, and the fellows are throwing us a combination wedding and farewell party, remember?"

"Oh, Lord, I almost forgot that," I exclaimed, jumping up off the bed to get my curlers, my one outstanding sop to all social affairs.

Then I got a better idea. "Let's make a date of it," I said eagerly, "I'll meet you at the Chinese restaurant before the party; we'll eat and then go. And I bet I'll have good news to tell you about the housing situation!" I finished ferociously, feeling like a cross between Tarzan of the Apes with his foot on a fallen tiger, and the spirit of Nathan Hale.

So the next morning, I started out especially early, determined on an apartment "or else." It was "or else." By four o'clock in the afternoon, I was hungry, heartsick, physically harassed and still homeless. Since I was near my mother's house, I decided to drop in there and recuperate before meeting John at five.

"Hello," my mother said pleasantly as I entered. "What's wrong with you?"

Nothing makes a girl feel as bad as to be told she looks bad; and since I was feeling bad in the first place, I began to feel worse.

"Everything's wrong," I groaned.

"No apartment yet?" my mother asked.

"Not a one." In an effort to emerge from my gloom, I opened up the Frigidaire, and stood there appraising the contents for a good take. "I just can't find a thing within our means," I said, reaching for a likely looking chicken wing. "If only we had more to spend!"

My mother gave me that blessed-are-the-poor look as I swallowed my first bite. "You made your own bed," she said virtuously; and I will never understand why people who make their own beds aren't at least allowed to forget and enjoy them. "But, anyway," she continued as I silently munched my chicken, "I think I've heard of something worth while. Interested?"

"Interested!" I jumped at her, food and all, reviving suddenly like a drunk under a cold shower.

After a while, when she considered me reasonably calmed down, she casually completed her account, as if it hadn't taken her days to track it down. Like many other fortunate people, my mother always had a friend of a friend of a friend, who had a further friend, with the right information tagged at the end. To someone like me,

who never in my life won at bingo, and who never could guess the lucky number on a prize board even when there was practically no one else trying, such ability was downright remarkable. In this particular case, it was a plain miracle.

"Mrs. Bodenheim told me that her cousin has a sister-in-law whose uncle lives in a house where the doctor just moved out," said my mother.

"Where is it?" I interrupted anxiously, as I gave up trying to follow the genealogy.

"42 Longview Road," she answered. "And it's got four rooms."

I threw my chicken bone in the sink and went looking for my purse.

"Where are you going now?" asked my mother.

"To see it, of course," I replied automatically, as if she had asked me who was buried in Grant's Tomb.

"Look, dear," said my mother patiently, "it's too late now. Go tomorrow with John, and besides, I thought you had a date with him. It's almost five already."

"Is it?" I had to look to be convinced. Reluctantly, I decided to wait until Sunday morning before inspecting the apartment, and settled instead on a ten-minute clean-up and personal redecoration drive before going to meet John.

As I washed and powdered, my mother insisted on giving me detailed instructions on how to act and what to say when I would go to Longview Road the next day.

"Don't show that you're too anxious," she said, "and don't accept the first price quoted. Mrs. Bodenheim said the rental was reasonable, but you say it's too high. They're always a few dollars out of the way, anyhow. And wipe off some of that lipstick," she finished, handing me a tissue.

Poor mother. Since then I have come to realize how difficult it must be for any parent to face the thought that her children are grown and independent, and how especially difficult it must have been for mine to permit me to arrange things myself, knowing, as

she did, that the mere possession of a wedding ring did not necessarily endow the owner with sudden maturity, wisdom, and shrewdness.

But then, of course, I was only annoyed.

"Oh, Mom," I spoke impatiently, "you talk as if I were a child!"

To which she sniffed. Then she smiled. "Have a good time, baby," she said and kissed me good by.

I flew to Tum Foo's in a spirit of joy. Yesterday, time had been marching by to the tune of Chopin's funeral dirge, but today it was Alexander's Ragtime Band in Blue Heaven, and the difference was immeasurable.

"You've found it," John exclaimed as I drew near our meeting place. It was the best kiss in nearly two whole weeks.

"Not exactly," I said, after I caught my breath again. "But this time we've got a real lead."

In two minutes I told the story, and in three, he was equally enthusiastic.

"I'm sure this is it," he said, as we stood holding hands on the street.

Finally, I remembered where we were. "John," I whispered, "everyone's looking. Let's go in and eat."

"The party," he said, "I almost forgot."

I pushed at the restaurant door in vain. As always, when it says "pull," I automatically push; and when it says "push," I pull.

"This way," said John, and opened the door with a natural affinity for such situations that has always amazed me.

Tum Foo's, like many Chinese restaurants, boasted dim lights, glum-faced waiters who wouldn't talk English though they knew how, a sickly kind of stewed onion smell, and an atmosphere as authentically oriental as Billy Rose's Diamond Horseshoe or the Yankee Stadium. But it was cheap.

"What'll you have?" John asked after we sat down at the entrancing, tubular, metal, bakelite-top table without a tablecloth, and

I began studying the menu with my new marital disregard for convention and nutrition.

"What'll you have?" I hedged. It was my personal contention that wherever possible we should both order different things, so as to experiment with a greater variety of foods at a particular place; but John had always preferred to choose what I did, because otherwise I usually ate his anyway. Not that he really minded, he said. Only it was disconcerting at times to order fried liver, anticipate fried liver, get fried liver, and then have to eat the codfish steak that I had asked for because his dish, to me, always looked prettier than mine.

At this point, the waiter came and stood morosely and silently over us, waving his order book like a deadly tomahawk. I quailed before the set, dull expression on his face, and quickly ordered, "the usual," as did John who must have been equally intimidated, although he denied it.

"Oh, well," I said philosophically as we began on the customary type of cloudy hot water for soup, onions and fried noodles with chicken wafted over it like garlic round a pot by a good cook, and tea; "anything else would probably taste the same here, so what difference does it make?"

By the time our dessert arrived, it was quite apparent that Mr. Waiter was impatient with our slow progress. As we sat talking and planning and dreaming aloud about the apartment we had not even seen, he put the check down, picked it up again, put it down again, then began to methodically clear the table and almost reset it for the next customers, until we got the subtle hint.

"I think he wants us to go," John said, laughing.

"Not until you finish my dessert," I said, pushing it over to his side. "I can't eat any more; I'm too excited."

"He won't like this extra delay," John warned, and we both giggled.

Finally we were ready to leave, and while John got up to get my white jacket, I examined the check. The thought occurred to me as

I did so, that such conduct would have been unpardonable before marriage when a girl was supposed to be totally blind to the pecuniary transactions taking place under her very nose. While, after marriage, a financial statement in any form expects and receives the avid interest of a love letter.

"Let's take a cab," John said, when we stood on the street again. "We're a little late, and we're celebrating."

A budget must have been an original female invention for all that most men understand of it.

"Too expensive," I protested, "and we really don't have anything definite to celebrate yet," I finished, crossing my fingers behind me.

"A celebration," said John hailing a cab, "should have rhyme, but no reason, to be the nicest kind," and I quickly conceded the point. My best times have always been unpremeditated, unprovoked, and unquestioning.

The ride was short, but pleasant, and John and I did right by the taxi's backseat in the best of such tradition.

All too soon we arrived. The hospital, where the party was being held, was an old red brick building with the interns' quarters in a wing on the main floor. My mother always used to say, when we attended social affairs there during our engagement: "It's terrible! You young people carrying on downstairs, laughing and dancing, while upstairs those poor people are sick and may be even dying!"

But somehow it never seemed that way to any of us. To all the boys living and working there, the hospital, and especially their own quarters, was like a wonderful, shabby home. To those of us visiting, it was just a social hall, with no scientific connotations at all. Of course, the loudspeaker would call at different intervals: "Dr. Hines wanted in Emergency," and so forth. And sometimes someone would have to leave because a baby was being born on the fifth floor, or a new patient needed an immediate transfusion. But, generally, everyone listened only to make sure his particular name wasn't being paged, without ever thinking about what someone

else's was being paged for; and many a young girl was wooed and won in the rare privacy of the laboratory alongside of the morgue.

"Here we go," John said, and as we entered the interns' quarters, it seemed that everyone else was already there. I was also glad, as I stood looking about, that I knew almost all of the crowd, because, for my money, there is no worse ordeal for a young bride than to endure the scrutiny and appraisal of her husband's friends for the first time.

It was a moment or two before anyone became aware of our presence. Bob Abbott, John's best friend, was playing ping-pong with what looked like a brand new girl, in the corner. Bob was the Beau Geste of the medical tribe. He dressed like a Saks Fifth Avenue dummy, behaved as much like a Casanovic sultan building up a harem as society allows, and seemed to think that he was What Every Young Girl Should Know. Karl Holzmänn, and his wife Trudy, a pretty Austrian girl, were dancing in the center of the room, while about five other couples were floating around.

"Hi," said Bob, dropping his racket, "look who's here!"

Everybody else pounced on us too. Janet Grayson began to pound "Here Comes the Bride" on the piano, but was almost completely drowned out by their noisy greetings.

"How's it feel to be married?" Alec Shaw called, and the general reaction to that bewhiskered remark would have given him a higher Hooper rating than Bob Hope and Bing Crosby combined.

Gert Shaw, Alec's wife, imported two years before from the wilds of Montana, came forward next. "Jesus Christ," she began, and we all roared expectantly. Gert's profanity, which slipped so effortlessly and naturally into her everyday speech, had long since passed the shocking stage, and became, instead, a hospital landmark. Her "Pass the God-damned butter, please" at the dinner table, or her "Is the bastard going to see the old bitch again?" when her husband was called upstairs to see a moribund patient, were all uttered with the casual detachment of a radio announcer rendering the baseball scores, followed by a forecast of the weather. "How the hell areya?"

she now demanded, and by past performances, John and I interpreted this as a warm welcome.

"Hey, get the groom a chair," Bob yelled just then. "The poor guy's all worn out; he'll fall apart."

This also registered high on the laugh meter, and we were jokingly shoved into near-by seats.

"Bring on the gifts," said Hilda Emmett, and I knew immediately that with her usual officiousness, Hilda had put herself in sole charge of selecting, wrapping, and producing the presents. She was born to collect dimes on street corners for worthy causes, to organize polite assistance for expectant catastrophes, and must have taken to World War II, when it came along, like a mouse to a cheese factory.

There was a pop-up electric toaster for us, a cocktail shaker with six glasses, and two guest towels.

"Oh, you shouldn't have," I said, knowing that they had spent their entire last month's pay, "but I'm glad you did."

Whereupon Bob added a tiny doll painted with a big, bold mustache, to represent a future Junior.

"I'll preserve it as a family heirloom," I told Bob, as he started to dance with me. "My first child!"

By now, the party was in top swing, with the radio going full force and everyone dancing with everyone else. Suddenly, we all stopped moving, as Miss O'Grady, the night supervisor of nurses came and stood in the doorway with a plea for less noise.

"It's carrying a little into the wards, upstairs," she explained.

"We're terribly sorry," we apologized immediately, and offered her a quick drink before going back on duty.

"You take one too," Bob said to me, as she left, but John, who had come up to where we were standing, answered for me: "She doesn't like it, Bob, and I'm getting tired of drinking the ones everybody forces on her."

I was a little surprised at John's open declaration of my attitude, but also pleased. My dislike for alcoholic beverages had often been

a major social sin during my adolescent and college years. Not that I am against liquor as such. I would certainly never demonstrate with a ten-foot neon sign against the Demon Rum, or write my Congressman about it either. If everyone else within a fifty-mile radius wanted to go on a ten day binge without bothering me, I would never complain—even if I do privately think that inebriation is a pitifully foolish state, and smells bad. I even like the way the ice clinks, and the way the long, cool, sophisticated, amber-filled tumblers look, and I collect mixers. It is unfortunate, however, that as far as I am concerned, the stuff tastes like a mixture of floor shellac, castor oil, camphor balls, and medicated cough drops.

But so great is the intolerance of the drinker for the Coca-Cola fan, like a Communist for the unconverted, that for years I would order drinks upon request, and leave them wastefully behind, purely as a gesture of self-defense. Now, as John spoke, I sensed a new liberation.

"You do as you please," he went on, turning to me, "and ignore the remarks. Come on, darling, we'll get you a good ginger ale before you die of thirst."

As we approached the refreshment table, I suddenly remembered that we hadn't told anyone of our new housing lead.

"That's a pretty good neighborhood," Janet Grayson said, after I made our announcement. She and Hank would be needing a place of their own in another few months, and it was obvious that she had already been brushing up on locations.

"I hope you get it," Bob said sincerely, "and if there's anything I can do, just let me know."

Bob was an honestly nice fellow, for which I was duly grateful since I would have hated to add his name to the tremendous list of good friendships broken up by a member's marriage. It was just that somewhere along the line someone had told him he was the Charles Boyer type, and he had begun to play Irresistible on his heart strings too long. I even felt sorry for pretty Agnes Hart, the

new girl with him, because she too was obviously sold on Mr. Apollo, and I wished I could caution her privately: "Danger. Wolfing Grounds Only. No fair play."

But John warned me off, so I held my peace.

Alec and Gert Shaw promised to come over and answer the telephone for us when we wanted to go to a movie.

"That's right," Janet said, "you need a baby sitter for a doctor's telephone. You'll find yourself rather tied down."

John laughed. "Who'll call?" he asked. "I don't even have an office yet, or a patient, either."

At this point, old Dr. Krentzman, the resident pathologist, spoke up in his ponderous English: "Just you wait," he said thoughtfully, "you'll have them both, office and patients alike. They'll come, and soon you'll work and work all the time and life will never be like this again," he waved his glass about the room.

There was a sudden silence as we all sat still digesting this. It was as if the cold voice of a soothsayer had swept eerily through the room.

Then we started to laugh and talk again as if to thus discard the uneasy premonition of a changing future.

"Let's leave now," I told John, shortly after midnight. "I've house-hunted all day and I'm tired. And tomorrow," I finished solemnly, as if I were anticipating the discovery of America, "if we really get the apartment, will be the second biggest day in our lives"—our lives, from that statement, having apparently begun with our marriage.

"Let us know how you make out," Bob said as we were saying our farewells, "and we'll post it on the staff bulletin board."

"Good luck" everyone called. "Thanks for everything," we replied, while Gert offered her personal charm from the depths of the leather couch: "Hope you like the God-damned joint," she said as we went out.

The next morning, of course, we overslept, but when I did awake

it was with a feeling of growing excitement. John, who had already shaved, said: "Come on, sleepyhead. This is the day."

He came over and kissed me good morning.

"It may be legal, but I still feel like a wanton woman," I said, stretching luxuriously.

"Would another kiss help?" John asked, pulling me close.

"It would not," I jumped up as I spoke, and began to get ready to leave. "Besides, I'm only doing my duty as a good wife by even allowing you in here," I teased.

Soon we were on the street heading for Longview Road.

"You don't suppose anyone's rented it already?" I asked John worriedly as we rushed forward. "It's almost twelve o'clock by now."

"Of course not," John said definitely.

As we neared our destination, I could see that we were in a middling part of town. Not that King Midas had any relatives there, or that Barbara Hutton would have used the best quarters as a stable for her worst horses, but a careful appraisal assured me that this wasn't Tobacco Road, either.

The apartment houses on either side, were high and well kept, and the children crowding the streets were noisy and messed, but not in rags. Number 42, the house on the corner, was only one block and a half from the subway station, and a cross-county bus stopped at the far east side. With quick sighs of relief, we both checked off "location" and stopped still in front of the building.

It was red brick and ugly, like a homely, freckled face, but it was also neat.

"Got your fingers crossed?" John asked.

"Locked tight," I answered fervently, as if I were saying a prayer.

Just then we both noticed the black and white sign, in the street entrance of the ground floor apartment, which said: "Four room apartment for Rent: Inquire Superintendent in the Rear."

John obediently set off for the rear, while I waited impatiently up front. Restlessly, I tried the street door, and to my surprise, it

opened. The invitation was too pointed to ignore, so I entered cautiously, making sure to leave the door wide open behind me, so that John would know I was safe inside and not a sudden victim of amnesia.

As soon as I crossed the threshold, I knew that our search was ended. This was no nine-year courtship—this was love at first sight.

There was a short entrance hall leading ahead into a medium-sized foyer about six feet wide and twelve feet long. On the right of the foyer were two doors leading into two large rooms. In the center of the foyer's back wall, there was the opening for the unusually-large kitchen, while to the far left was a little hall with a bedroom and bath off it. The entire apartment was immaculately clean, walls newly painted white, floors scraped and the tile shining.

So engrossed was I in examining the place, that I never even noticed John's entrance with the superintendent's wife, until a voice behind me asked, "Like it?"

I jumped and turned around. "Darling," I nearly hugged him in my excitement. "Isn't it wonderful? Isn't it perfect? Can't you just see us living here, John?"

He laughed at my animation, and the superintendent's wife, who until then had seemed bored with the routine of showing a vacancy, smiled too.

"Newlyweds?" she asked, more as if stating a fact.

I grinned back at her. "Does it show like a rash, Mrs. —"

"Lang," the superintendent's wife replied. She was a heavy-set woman, about two hundred pounds, or more, but with a surprisingly young-looking face, and kind, bright, blue eyes. As we stood laughing at each other, I felt that I had made a new friend. A good sense of humor can be a vital bond, and Freda, as we soon came to call her, was doubly so blest.

"Oh yes," she said merrily, "when you're married over twenty years like me, you can always spot when it's brand new. It is, isn't it?"

"A whole month," I answered, "next week." And we went on to exchange names and histories and cases.

"Tell you what," Freda said, when she heard how we had looked and looked for a place to live, "this is a good apartment for a doctor. Feller here before, Dr. Trent, do you know him?" We shook our heads, no. "Well, anyway, he did fine here too. Had to move just because they were having twins. They were newlyweds also when they moved in, but a lot older than you two."

"Twins," I exclaimed. "Goodness, we're not thinking of those things yet. I hope it doesn't haunt this place. Is it catching, dear?" I joked to John.

"Never heard of that kind of proximity as a new method of reproduction," John answered, and we all laughed again.

We were having a wonderful time. We opened closets and looked in cabinets and even Freda joined in the fun of planning the layout. I found a tremendous closet off the foyer front wall, that was four feet by eight, and had an electric fixture and would make a perfect storeroom. The kitchen was unbelievably large, with two-thirds of it set aside for dining purposes. The bedroom had cross ventilation, and since the apartment was on street level, there was a thick, green hedge outside the court window.

"What's supposed to be good in that?" John asked when I marveled at it. "Probably block off air."

"You've just no imagination," I scoffed. "Don't you see we can pretend it's a private garden?"

We moved over to the window, hand in hand, and stood looking out at the crowded street. It was early afternoon by now, and the street, despite the high apartment houses on either side, was filled with bright sunshine and crowded with noisy children and gossiping mothers.

John looked sober. "Darling," he said, groping for words, "I wish I could give you a better start, and not have to crowd into a place like this for home and office both. Do you mind very much?"

"Never will," I answered, equally serious. "Of course, I think

there's something wrong with a civilization that makes you put the best years of your life into hard work and leaves you free to enjoy it only when you're too old to learn how or care. But you didn't start the custom. As for this," I pointed to the street, "I know it's not exactly beautiful with all the clamor and congestion, but that's supposed to be good for a young doctor starting out, isn't it? And we have our own private street entrance, so we can feel apart from the other tenants, as if we had a separate home of our own. And think of what we can tell our grandchildren some day: from rags to riches in two easy lessons, or how to climb the beanstalk overnight!"

Suddenly I stopped short. "For Heaven's sake," I remembered. "My mother said not to seem overanxious or they'd quote the highest price. Have we spilled the beans!"

John laughed. "Two big financiers," he said, "that's us."

After consideration, we reapproached Freda who was tactfully waiting in the kitchen, and by mutual consent laid all our cards on the table.

She appreciated our dilemma. "I tell you," she said, "let's forget this is a strictly business deal. I like you, and I'm only hired help. The landlord gave me a top and bottom price, so I'll give you the bottom right off the bat because," she laughed aloud, "you were about to leave and I couldn't let a good prospect go." The figure she named was fair, and just within our means.

"And say," she added as an afterthought, after we thanked her, "you know what? That wooden partition in the office that separates that big large room into a consultation room and a treatment room, as if it were two rooms, well, Dr. Trent installed it himself, and told me to try to collect something from the next tenant and keep it for myself. I'll tell my old man you were tough customers and I had to let you have it free. But you can count it as a wedding present from me to both of you."

"Oh, Mrs. Lang," I sighed, "you're wonderful. Just wait until I tell my mother how we made out."

"Why not call her from the pay station in the cellar?" she asked. "Your husband can wait here."

So I went in back and eagerly phoned my mother.

"What's the rent?" she asked after congratulating us on finding a place.

I told her proudly. "And that's five dollars less than the top price," I couldn't help boasting.

"Really?" said my mother. "What did you do?"

"Chewed her down," I crowed with mental apologies to Freda. But my mother remained unimpressed and simply implied that Heaven, with her assistance, was known to look after fools.

"And maybe she's really right," I told John after I came back to the apartment and we had given Freda a ten dollar deposit on the place plus our profuse gratitude and she had left. "We certainly got looked after just fine, didn't we?"

We stood alone in the empty flat and smiled happily at each other.

"Now," I told John, "I know how the Pilgrims felt when they landed on Plymouth Rock."

CHAPTER THREE



Delusions of Grandeur

*'Mid pleasures and palaces, wherever you may roam,
There's nothing in the world that looks wonderful as home;
The cracks across the ceiling, the scratches on the chair,
The hole behind the painting, Oh, nothing can compare!
Home, home sweet home!*

—with apologies to John Howard Payne's "Home, Sweet Home"

The instinct to play house is as inherent as the Darminian law of self-preservation, and as basic as holding hands in the movies. It begins with the first new doll and the little next-door neighbor boy, and it never ends. Scoffed at in adolescence, ignored during college, it emerges finally triumphant in marriage, completely vindicated and revered.

Unfortunately, though, this urge is not equally distributed between the sexes, and therein lies the rub. Given a house and a "he," any female can go on from there. But, just as the neighbor boy is an unwilling participant in the "Now I'll be Mama, you be Papa, and this is our home" routine, so, too, the adult male is a reluctant accessory to the game.

Even I was a little surprised at the many decorative ideas in home-making that popped into my head as soon as we had taken technical

possession of our apartment by signing the lease and pocketing the keys.

"But what on earth is wrong with the place?" asked John in bewilderment after I outlined my plans for its rejuvenation. "I thought you liked it. We had it all arranged with the foyer as a waiting room and the large room with the subdivision for a consultation and treatment room. Don't you like it any more?"

"Of course I do," I affirmed ecstatically.

To my blissfully blinded eyes, the average-sized, ordinary-looking rooms were like vistas from an *Arabian Nights* dream, glamourized as they were by youth and love and personal possession. And if I was even remotely aware that my mother, for instance, had called the sink an "ugly, old-fashioned monstrosity," or had said that the bedroom was very small, I forgivingly blamed it on the myopia of the middle aged.

"We have a beautiful place," I told John firmly.

"Then why do you want to make so many changes?" he persisted.

"I don't know," I said, "but I guess I just want to fix it up some more. It must be something I read somewhere," I finished lamely, since, with a book available nowadays on every subject, that seemed a logical source of blame. But he still looked at me as if I were an incipient schizophrenic.

"Look, darling," I went on persuasively as he remained silent, "I want to do it for both of us. It does make sense. Take this room," and I paused for effect.

We were standing in the kitchen of the still vacant flat, which was lit by only a naked-looking bright bulb on the ceiling above, and as I spoke we both looked around.

"It's nice," I tried to explain, "but on the dark side. If we paint it bright white instead of this dull cream color, it'll look grand. And," I went on pulling him through the other rooms as I continued, "take this foyer. If it's to be a waiting room, we should paper it and make the most of it, shouldn't we? And the bedroom—

why John, anyone can see how pretty it would look in pale blue!"
Anyone but John, that is.

"Pale blue," he repeated sadly, and sighed.

I sighed too, and by mutual consent we sank down on the bare floor. But I had not yet given up.

"And the living room," I said next, waving in its general direction, "needs bookshelves for my library, and you can make those, can't you?"

"Me?" he nearly shrieked, jumping up. "Me make bookshelves? I'm a doctor not a carpenter."

"Don't get technical," I answered standing up too. "You yourself told me that you built those shelves yourself in your bedroom at home, didn't you?"

He winced audibly at the recollection.

"I talk too much," he said.

But now I was getting angry and feeling hurt.

"Anyone would think it wasn't your house too," I said heatedly, completely unaware of the primitive truth I was speaking. Actually, it took me long months to learn what I have since accepted as elemental as long hair on girls and whiskers on men: that no house is ever a man's. He lives in it, sleeps in it, eats in it. He covers the floors when he thinks of it, lights the lamps when necessary, and draws the shades; but never is it more than a type of required shelter, never more than a means to a utilitarian end. And never, never does he wholly comprehend the frills and fancies of housekeeping that are so vital and endearing to the female mind.

But at that time, of course, I was simply outraged. "Do you mean to say," I demanded, "that you won't make shelves for us or paint or anything?"

"I didn't say that at all as yet," John answered. "I just don't see why we have to," he continued with annoying relevancy, as if logic had ever been intended as a necessary part of husband and wife conversations.

For a moment I was stumped. I knew I could never manage the whole job all by myself, especially since I had never even painted the face of a penny before. What would I do if John wouldn't help willingly? How could I avoid what looked like a deadly earnest but foolish quarrel?

Suddenly, I seemed to remember a scene from at home, an oft-repeated scene.

"Will you hang the curtains, dear?" my mother would say pleasantly to my father who would be contentedly absorbed in the evening paper.

"Tomorrow, dear, tomorrow." His disinterested reply was invariably the same.

"But that's what you've been saying since last week," my mother would protest.

"But this tomorrow I will," he would repeat, still not even looking up.

"Very well, I'll hang them myself," my mother would say, turning to send me for the ladder.

And that always did it: down went the paper, up went the drapes, and knighthood flowered.

Warily, I considered my present situation. Anything was worth a try. "Very well, darling," I said, feeling like an amateur in a Shakespearian Village Barn production about to muffle her lines, "I'll paint and paper and do all the work myself," and I started offstage as if to tackle the job immediately, with the martyrdom befitting a Joan of Arc.

John, fortunately, although a little slow on the uptake, caught on.

"Oh, darling," he said picking up the proper cue and coming over to hold me in his arms, "of course I'll help you do everything. I wouldn't think of letting you work by yourself."

Well, what do you know, I thought exultantly. Chivalry is not dead!

If I thought that, with John on my side, however, half the battle

was won, I was mistaken. On the very next morning, Tuesday to be exact, I faced another problem.

"Theoretically that sounds fine," my mother said when I stopped by to reveal the latest developments, and incidentally to consume a good lunch, "but how are you going to do all that? You don't know how, and when?"

I was fazed, but only for a moment.

"Oh well," I announced gaily, "we'll manage," as if it were all a matter of blowing my nose.

"But how?" she insisted, pinning me down.

"Well, I'll work all day," I said slowly, figuring it out as I progressed, "and John will chime in whenever he's off duty at the hospital. How? Why out of these!" I finished, dropping the load of magazines I had been collecting from her living room plump into her lap.

Oh I was smug and sure. Like most of my generation, I had grown up with the modern gospel that anything can be done out of a book. "You too can write," say the advertisements, and many a busy woman feels she is a thwarted Pearl Buck, if only she had "the time" to send for the pamphlet. "We papered a room between lunch and supper," says another, and there is the smiling, well-dressed lady, trim, neat, clean, with not a speck of dust or paste on her hands, to prove it.

Play the piano? Paint your garage? Build a house? It all becomes a matter of so many pages, depending upon what you want to do. Two hundred-fifty pages plus illustrations does the cottage; 150 with designs makes a hat; and a mere soft-covered booklet covers the less intricate problems of raising hens. The glorious age of specialization!

"Experience?" I repeated my mother's next question in astonishment. "What difference does that make?"

At this point, she gave up. "Go ahead," she said as I got ready to leave. "After all, it isn't as if you could afford to hire anyone

to do it for you in any case." Her mournful tone put me back again in the bed I had made, and I realized suddenly that it is usually the parents who mind and not the children. "But," she sighed eloquently in conclusion, "you'll see."

And I saw.

First I shopped for the necessary tools, and that was fun. Storekeepers, the small, personal, friendly kind, are my favorite people. For the price of a brush, or a few nails, or any other implement, one can receive a scholarly dissertation on anything from outhouses to portrait painting and roast pig. They are the connoisseurs and the artists of their trades. A simple question will lead to a eulogy; a carefully worded phrase will elicit what is almost a practical demonstration, and the storekeeper and I finally part in the camaraderie of good fellowship and coworkers.

Mr. Schmitt, in the general hardware store, was no exception. As soon as I explained my situation to him, he welcomed me as a secret compatriot, and offered invaluable aid.

"Ach no, not vit dose clumsy brushes," he said, as instinctively I chose the least likely ones, "but dese iss vot you need. Half the price und twice as good."

And he produced from behind the counter two good-looking brushes, and handed them to me with the air of a fellow conspirator turning over secret documents to a saboteur.

"Paint?" he considered my next problem for a moment. "You vant already colored or mix your own?"

"Just a minute," I said, and looked up the article in point in my magazine: "Anyone Can Paint a Room the Easy Way."

Finally I decided. "I'll mix my own," I announced. "It says here that you save money if you buy a lot of white paint and just add pigment."

"Shure, shure," Mr. Schmitt agreed, looking quite curiously at my literary consultant. "Und from dat you will do it?" he asked skeptically.

"Of course," I said, quickly showing him the title of the article. "And I can paper too from on page 96 of this magazine," and I held up another. "See?"

"Vell," said Mr. Schmitt judiciously scratching his shaggy gray head, "maybe. In my day, for someding like this ve used common sense, a couple of directions and experience showed uns vot else dere vas. Und now, it's like a big job vid pages und pages to read, and no common sense and no experience. A big fuss von nodings, I tink. Und now," he returned to the job at hand, "vot else?"

I bought blue and rose pigment, chose the wallpaper for the foyer, tore off a piece to use as a means of deciding on the background color for the outer panels, and with all my supplies piled high, started for Longview Road.

At first, I had intended to merely deposit my purchases in the apartment, with the idea of starting work that night when John was due to meet me there. But then I got one of my unfortunate inspirations: Why not paint the kitchen right now and surprise John with the finished product when he arrived? Dreamily, I envisioned his startled: "But darling, when did you do it?"

"This afternoon," I would say casually, flipping the brush back in the can and smoothing the folds of my skirt.

"But it's beautiful and you're marvelous," he would say, pressing me close, and I would reply nonchalantly, looking like the well-dressed lady in the advertisements, and sounding like a college hero after a touchdown run: "Oh, it was nothing at all!"

With a happy sigh, I decided to start at once.

Paint! I told myself: Anyone can smear a brush around and get a room finished. Dressed as I was, and humming cheerfully as if I were about to water a plant, I began to undo the can of white paint.

"Well, well, and what are you doing now?" a voice near me asked.

Startled, I almost dropped the paint, which by now was opened, all over myself.

"Oh Freda," I exclaimed, recognizing the superintendent's wife.

"I saw you come in and came along to see if I could help," she said, and then repeated: "What are you doing?"

"You scared me," I said, then added: "I'm going to paint the kitchen."

"In that dress?" she gasped, pointing to my trousseau silk print. "For heaven's sake, you wait and I'll bring you a coverall," she said, "or else you'll ruin your clothes."

"Oh," I said very brightly, never having thought of that before. But I hesitated because that wasn't exactly in my daydream of how I would appear before John when he came, and then I thought, "Well, I'll take it off before he comes," and asked Freda, with an eye on the sticky paint: "Do you really think I should?"

For answer, she turned and walked away, only to reappear in a few minutes with a tremendous kind of smock. We rolled up the sleeves, giggled over how I looked, and then after making my proper thanks and apologies, I casually started to paint as if I were simply going into the bathroom to brush my teeth.

Easy, did I say? Oh yes. What the magazines didn't tell me was that paint drips—all over the painter. That when you wield a brush, small rivulets of paint roll down and ruin the smooth surface of the wall. That reaching up and down and up and down and up and down makes your arm feel as if it's attached to a dead weight, which will sooner or later detach it from your body. That painting is messy and dirty and sticky; that it clings to your hair and your hands and your clothes. That the odor of paint is unbearable, and that it makes it difficult to breathe and causes the eyes to smart and run.

Although I felt as bitterly betrayed by my magazines as Julius Caesar by Brutus, I painted on with grim determination. No Gunga Din with his water, and no Horatio with his bridge was more heroic or persistent than I, but by the time John came in at six o'clock, I could gladly have perished in the cause, as did they.

As he entered, I remembered my foolish plan to flip the brush in

the can and take my bows. Instead, I was a horrible mess, and little was done. Just looking at his neat, clean clothes made me want to weep, and when he innocently said: "Hello, sweetheart, why you've almost got one wall done!" it was just too much. I started to cry aloud into my can of paint.

John didn't dare come close to me, since I was all covered with paint by then, and we both had too much respect for his best blue suit. But he consoled me from the doorway, and blew me a kiss.

"Just you wait," he said, "and I'll get to work too. Then we'll finish fast. Poor darling, you're all tired out. Did you eat?"

I shook my head. "I can't anyway," I wailed. "I'm covered with paint."

Just then Freda came back again. "I thought I saw you come in doctor," she said, and handed him a coverall with a big grin. "And here's a sandwich for you," she said, turning to me and placing it on the drainboard. "I put some turpentine in the bathroom. You can wash the paint off there."

Her brusque kindness made me want to slobber again, but I sniffed instead. "You're an angel," I told her warmly, meaning every word of the hackneyed phrase.

After she left, I cleaned up enough to settle down with her ham on rye, and I could almost feel my disposition improving bite by bite. "Mind over matter," I thought as I ate. "Bosh!" Experience (that instrument of torture wielded by the old against the young), had just shown me that an empty stomach will always command respect.

John, meanwhile, carefully donned his coverall as if it were an operating room gown, and tackled the next wall as if it were an anesthetized patient. The role of peaceful watcher appealed to me far more than that of active worker, but as soon as I finished eating, I pitched in too.

At first, there was sporadic conversation.

"Anything new at the hospital today?" I asked, in between strokes.



"You left a patch near the top," John panted. "I did another major surgical case all by myself."

"Where did I leave a patch? Oh, I see." I paused for breath. "That's grand," I finally went on. "You didn't think the Old Boy would let you get any more cases since your minimum quota's full and— Oh Lord, it squirted in my eye!"

Gradually, however, we worked in a grim silence only. The walls went pretty well, and the ceiling too, except that every time we looked up to see how it was coming along, we each got a full dose of shining white paint in our hair.

"The last lick," John called out at last.

"Amen," I answered gratefully, and stopped too.

Wearily, we turned to survey our accomplishment. At first exhausted glance, it all looked about the same if only whiter, and I swore mentally at the perfidy of magazines that promise voodoo results from bright colors and small prints and tiny rooms. But as I concentrated hard, the walls began to shine unbelievably white in the glare of the uncovered bulb, and the very place seemed to expand and grow bigger and brighter than before.

"Oh John," I breathed, recovering my confidence, and behaving as if I were surveying Buckingham Palace in my kitchen, "isn't it a marvelous improvement? Isn't it beautiful now?"

But poor John, the unwilling cog in the domestic machine, could only sigh in imminent collapse. "Maybe," he said, and then added in the perfect connubial tradition, "but if it makes you happy," and his voice trailed off.

"Happy?" I laughed, and throwing caution to the winds, I kissed him right on his paint-covered mouth. Then, for further emphasis, I threw my paint brush up in the air, where it promptly came down and landed on both our heads.

The next morning, Wednesday, I tackled the bedroom: pale blue.

Carefully, I mixed my pigment in the can of white and sure enough it all turned blue. Score one for the magazines, I thought,

except of course that it wasn't exactly pale blue. Somehow, it turned out a deeper shade on the purple side, but by that time I was no stickler for trifles. Deep blue it came out, deep blue it would be.

As for the painting itself, I was no longer even an approximate novice. Not that I actually accomplished much more, or did significantly better at the job, but that this time I came fortified with the terrible knowledge of what to expect. Even John, when he came to take over his share at six o'clock, wore an old suit of clothes, and after curtailed greetings, hustled out to work like a union man reporting for a piece-work job.

But that night we finished the bedroom which we also admired extravagantly, and on Thursday morning I was ready for the foyer. Mr. Schmitt, whose practical advice I had come to respect much more than the lyrical descriptions of *American House Beautified* had suggested that I paint the outer paneling first, so as not to soil the wallpaper after it was on.

Obediently, I dug up my rose pigment and mixed, sitting over the paint with the same intensity that Macbeth's three witches used in stirring their famous brew.

"It looks too dark," said Freda, who, as usual, was visiting. "Pour in some more white."

Too dark, too light; too light, too dark. I tried it again and again until, in desperation, I said: "This is it, and anyhow I don't care," and started to paint.

By this time I was professionally oblivious of painted cheeks and bleary eyes, and had even developed a few of the appropriate muscles so annoyingly necessary for greater painting speed. When John arrived, again at six, the outer paneling was all done, and I greeted him cheerfully with: "Now we're all set to paper the rest. Aren't we gaining ground?"

But John was unimpressed. "I don't know how to paper a room," he said.

"Neither do I," I answered, "but it tells how here."

For this, I had found a chapter in a book, and I proceeded to read aloud.

"You mean," asked John, "that you expect to read it just like that, and do it?"

"Of course," I said. "Look, first we have to make the paste."

So we made the paste.

"Too thin, I think," was John's verdict.

"Add some more flour," I said, and we did.

"Now it's too thick," John said, putting in some more water.

Finally it seemed just of the right consistency, only quite lumpy.

"Does it talk about lumps in the book?" he asked.

I looked. "Nope," I said after a hurried perusal, "but Mr. Schmitt did."

"What did he say?" John spoke anxiously.

"To watch out for them," I replied. "But maybe it doesn't matter much," I went on "so let's get going with step number 2."

Step number 2 was cutting the paper. Since we had no table, we cut the long strips on the floor, which was uncomfortable, at best, and inaccurate, at worst; and soon we were ready for the hanging.

"Let's go," John said, lifting the first piece in place. "I'll do the top, you do the bottom, and whoever finishes first is responsible for the middle."

"Fine," I answered, and moved to my place as if a gun had gone off to start a race. Need I say, either, who eventually wound up doing two thirds of the work?

It was two A.M. when we hung the last strip, and turned with hungry eyes to survey our kingdom.

Something was wrong. Was it the paper? No. True, the paste showed through quite lumpy from underneath, but not unbearably so to our prejudiced eyes. True, we had forgotten to match the designs on the different pieces each to each, but even there we were unbelievably fortunate in having chosen a pattern in which this didn't seem to be of great consequence. What difference would it make, and why should anyone care if occasionally the lady in the

print was to be seen holding a house instead of a bunch of flowers? And yet something was undeniably wrong.

"It's the color of the paint!" we both exclaimed simultaneously. And that was it. The rose I had painted in the outer panels was much too purple a color for the paper, and the result was sickly and hideous.

"Oh, John," I nearly wept, "and after all my work today too!"

"You'll have to do it over tomorrow," he said.

Silently, wearily we washed up in Freda's turpentine, and just before switching off the lights prior to our departure, John delivered his daily commentary:

"But, darling," his tired voice uttered, "is all of this really necessary?"

On Friday, I carefully redid the foyer walls, and although I would have defied any decorator to accurately label the final shade, even John, when he arrived in the early evening, had to admit that the general effect was lovely.

"And now," I began in that bright, cheerful "This will hardly hurt" doctor tone of voice, "you make the bookshelves, I paint them white to match the woodwork and we're all through."

We were standing in the kitchen after a satisfactory tour of inspection, and John was leaning on the wall. "Good," he said. "I mean that we're almost finished. Darling, something tells me we could qualify for union work by now. Or are they demanding a Ph.D. as a prerequisite, these days?"

I started to laugh, but stopped as John lifted his hand from the kitchen wall with a smothered groan. On his palm, was a big streak of sticky white, gathered obviously from the bottom of one of those paint runs, where it had solidified into one of those treacherous pools that burst under the slightest pressure, like tar bubbles in a hot sun.

"I thought it was dry," he raged.

"So did I," I said placatingly, "but don't worry. What's a drop of extra paint to a veteran like you?"

Only partially consoled, he prepared to start the bookshelves. These, all things considered, went comparatively fast for here, to quote John, we were dealing with an "expert."

"Just you watch me darling," he huffed and puffed. "I'm an old hand at this," meaning, of course, those three tiny shelves in his former bedroom.

But I did not scoff. Considering that this was my first experience with the masculine ego, I think I behaved very well. A man will stubbornly refuse for weeks to participate in any practical domestic work, but once the mountain is moved and action attained, he will boast for years about the sacred objects of his craftsmanship. The curtain rod he hung is forever removed from the realm of all ordinary curtain rods; the doorstop he has painfully made is rightfully a masterpiece belonging in the Museum of Modern Art. And so, significantly, John's bookshelves remained forever the pride of his heart.

With instinctive tact, I oh'd and ah'd, never even for a moment complaining when the shelves turned out to be about eight inches too high for the conventional book length. Instead, we got some pasteboard molding from Freda's husband, and happily hammered it in over the top of each shelf, so that it hung down like a wooden canopy and thus lowered the ungainly height.

"Very distinctive," John said, sucking a sore thumb.

"Very," I agreed. It was like no other bookshelves I had ever seen, but even so, it looked beautiful to both of us. Everything looked beautiful then.

"I'm going to call my mother right now," I said after the last brush was put away, and the Venetian blinds which we had inherited for the apartment from Dr. Trent, were installed. "Just wait until she sees what we've accomplished!"

It was not enough that we admired: There must be corroboration too.

"Well," I demanded of my mother when she came and saw, "what do you think?"

I often wonder now what I expected her to say. The work was done, the choices made, the decisions fully acted upon. Besides which, there is no honest answer to "what do you think?" since there is no sincere forgiveness to an unfavorable reply. There are very few characters strong enough to say "Tell me the truth," and then take it; and personally I can think of five rather nice people today whom I have never been able to really like, simply because they offered valid criticism upon request.

I saw my mother's eyes hesitate at the strange, petticoated bookshelves, and her hand wander to the unmatching strips of wallpaper, but all she said was: "Lovely. You've done much better than I thought you could," which was definitely dubious praise.

"And now," she asked next, "what about furnishing the place?"

"Furnishing?" asked John quickly. "I thought we were all through!"

"Almost," I said quickly, trying to maintain the fiction of a united front before my mother. "We've laid the groundwork, but we have to put furniture in to live with, too."

"Groundwork," groaned John, and subsided as I kicked his foot.

"Have you thought about it at all?" my mother said.

John hadn't, but I had: thought and looked and read to no avail. People like John and me just didn't seem to exist for the editors of the ordinary magazines, where pine-paneled dens and mirrored powder rooms are of greater importance than undersized living rooms and dining tables practically in the kitchen sink.

But like everything else, the silver lining to our problem of what to get was our inability to buy it. The essentials, of course, we could manage: bed, chairs, tables, office equipment, et cetera. But much of the rest would have to wait a more pecunious day.

Except, I decided, a painting and rugs. Why these two items were so terrifically important to me, I cannot say. Even now, I would not die for modern or worry about traditional, or recognize as a cardinal sin the indiscriminate mixing of periods. As with most things in this super-specialized, technical world of ours, I still resent the fact that

good personal taste in homemaking has bowed down before the dictates of fashion, and certainly then I was even less of a convert.

But I wanted a painting, a genuine, oil painting and I couldn't afford it.

"Make it yourself," John said teasingly. "Isn't that our operating principle?"

"I wish I could," I answered seriously, but truthfully, since unfortunately I am one of those people whose best attempts at drawing make the most extreme modern art look comparatively intelligible.

And then one day, when John and I were out walking, we came across a lovely scenic picture marked down to almost nothing. Inquiry explained the miracle as being the result of a big tear in the canvas right across a tremendous tree trunk in the foreground.

"Let's get it," I whispered to John, "and we'll fix it up. All right?"

So we bought it and took it home.

"Put flamed adhesive on the back over the damaged area," John advised, and it worked fine. Then I bought some paints and blackened the suture line, brightened up the sky with a little more blue, and stopped there only because John insisted.

"Beautiful," I breathed happily when it was finished, as if I had just been presented with an original Van Gogh. "And now, all we need is some rugs."

By this time, we had four mahogany and white leather chairs and a red plaster lamp with a white shade in the foyer waiting room; a table and four red leatherette chairs from my Aunt Hilda in the kitchen, and a bed, chest, dresser, two night tables, and two lamps (John's cousin Steve), in the bedroom. The living room was adequately filled with my old tremendous grand piano which my mother had graciously donated, somewhat in the nature of a reward for those many years of practice, or, as Gert Shaw insisted, when she saw it, because "no one left in the house could work the God-damned thing"; a red velvet couch with twin tables and white lamps

from my father; John's famous bookshelves; and now our beautiful painting which was hung in full glory over the sofa.

"If only we could get carpets for the floors," I told John after we hung the picture, "then everything would be perfect."

We even had some old drapes from my Aunt Jean's house, and some valuable knickknacks from John's Aunt Sarah.

"Do we need that junk around?" John asked, after she had departed one day, leaving behind a large Dresden shepherdess, a bronze bowl said to be in the family for over a hundred years, and a pair of heavy copper decorated candelabras.

"They're supposed to be antiques," I said, looking about for a place to put them.

But I knew what he meant. It may be a sign of arrested artistic and cultural development, but antiques have always been, and still are, just so much used furniture to me; and I will never understand for instance, why a hideous, old spinet that won't play properly, should be given house room and pocketbook preference over a sound, modern Steinway.

In any case, however, all that I found wanting in our new home were a few carpets.

"Why not pick up something nice, but cheap?" John suggested. "I hate bare floors too. You're right about them making a house seem cold."

But cheap things, in general, were the crux of one of our greatest problems.

"Cheap things are just as expensive in the long run," my mother proclaimed, horrified that we should even think of that. "They wear out and have to be replaced."

This was undeniably the consensus of seasoned opinion.

"But what's so wrong with replacements?" I asked, expressing my own point of view.

To my mind, if more people sat down and personally weighed practicality and monotony versus impracticality and variety, we would have a different set of conclusions. A thing approximating

forever is not necessarily a thing of beauty, and many an object of the greatest integrity wears out its desirability long before it exhausts its usefulness. Of course, where there is an abundance of wealth, none of this matters. But for myself, I had worn too many clothes I had grown to hate just because they had "cost so much" and were as yet intact. How well I remembered my joy when my black hat accidentally fell into the water while rowing, my happiness when a detestable bedroom lamp broke and I could go out, with a clear conscience and buy whatever I pleased at last!

"John," I said, making up my mind, "let's outlive fifty houses and their furnishings, and the heck with quality."

So, despite my mother's protests, we covered all our floors, except the kitchen which had a red linoleum, with something called "Broad-felt."

"Looks just like broadloom carpeting," the salesman said encouragingly, and it did, if you stood ten feet away, and looked through half-closed, blood-shot eyes.

But it came in a deep blue for the bedroom, bright red for the living room, soft gray for the foyer and office, and did add a cozy warmth to the house when it was laid.

But then, everything looked beautiful to me there, until the time when I stood all alone waiting for John to come home to spend our first sleeping night. As I waited for his arrival, I was seized with a sudden doubt.

All at once, the fading afternoon light made all the rooms seem gray and dismally dull. The floor coverings under my feet felt unusually thin and hard, and the unmatching strips of paper in the foyer stood out glaringly, ridiculously. I stood at the kitchen window, with the cold bare walls about me, and looked out into the shabby-looking, crowded, noisy street. Where was the beauty now? Where was the glorious feeling of accomplishment, of having hewn a home out of a wilderness?

"It's poor looking and cheap," I thought. "All our work was just a sham. It's nothing much at all!"

Just then, I heard John's key in the lock, and I struggled for self-control. But instead of coming straight inside, he called: "Close your eyes, and don't open until I say."

"All right," I called back, glad of the respite.

I stood waiting until he said "Ready," and then went out to where he was. He had lighted the foyer lamp, and its softly shining glow lit up the entire place. There was low, sweet music coming in from the living room, and on the table, beside the lamp, was his Aunt Sarah's bronze bowl filled with a large, glorious, fragrant bunch of the reddest roses I had ever seen.

"For our first official night in our wonderful new home," he said proudly, smiling happily at me, and just like that as I stood beside him, everything was beautiful again.

And it has been ever since.

CHAPTER FOUR



Get a Horse!

*Riding through the streets
In a car, is very gay,
But oh, the times we longed
For a one-horse open sleigh.*

*Motors on the blink,
Flats that come at night,
Oh, what heaven it must be
To own a horse that's bright.*

—with apologies to “Jingle Bells”

An automobile, for anyone, is a wonderful thing—at times. It is speed and flight and freedom and fabulous joy; it is the modern, adult version of the Magic Carpet, a pair of Silver Skates, and the seven-league boots. It is power itself.

Or else, it is sheer tyranny: You climb into your car, comment happily on the “Fine day, isn’t it?”, step on the starter confidently, and lo and behold, nothing happens. You begin an important journey, reach a point exactly ten miles from no place with about five minutes left in which to get there, when suddenly, with an uncanny type of human perversity, your motor goes chug, chug, chug (each chug

weaker than the one before) and stops dead. The excruciating disappointment, the thwarted anger, the bitter betrayal!

But an automobile for a doctor is all that plus being as vital a part of his initial operating equipment as boxing gloves to Joe Louis or a sarong to Dorothy Lamour. He may often seriously wonder why the motor car is here to stay. He may even yearn occasionally for the comparative certainty of an old-fashioned horse and wagon, but in sickness or health, for better or worse, as John and I discovered also, the car is a doctor's worst enemy and best friend.

At first, of course, John and I were both so engrossed with the effort and excitement of moving into our own place, that little else mattered. Even after our first night there, we found much to be done.

"You collect all your personal belongings at your mother's," John said the very next morning, "and I'll dig up my stuff from the hospital and my aunt's, and I'll pick you up in a cab. That way, we'll finally get ourselves moved in too."

That being the logical next step, I said, "Right," and spent the whole day sorting through all kinds of sentimental junk that started with teething rings, ran the gamut through adolescent love letters and never ended.

"So much?" John looked surprised when he called for me with a cab and I got in scarcely able to manage the oversized, cardboard box.

"What about you, Brutus?" I demanded, noticing quickly that he had two of them on the front seat.

As soon as we got home, we spread the contents of our boxes on the bedroom floor like two misers inventorying their safety vaults, and began methodically to recount and stow them away in the empty drawers. The rubbish was incredible, and my only consolation now is that many more mature people than we were then clutter up their lives similarly. Maybe "You can't take it with you" is irrefutable truth, but certainly we all try.

John, whose two containers seemed to have false bottoms, turned up first with a peculiar-looking gray bone.

"Isn't it a beautiful pelvis?" he asked proudly, placing it on our bed.

"Beautiful," I replied tactfully, placing it on the floor. "But must we have it in the house?"

John looked hurt. "But sweetheart," he exclaimed, as if it were just a question of understanding, "that's part of Oscar, the first stiff I ever had at med school. I couldn't throw him out. Don't you see?" he finished pathetically, acting like I had suggested evicting his ailing grandmother.

I saw, and although to this day I never rediscover Oscar's remains without a definite feeling of horror (for we still have him), I reluctantly agreed to give it closet space. Wasn't it John's house too?

But the hip was only the beginning of a long list that I also stoically, if unhappily, accepted. There was an embalmed foetus in the six month stage, various pathological specimens preserved in formaldehyde, a supercolossal skull (I quote John), with "both jaws intact and no teeth missing," and innumerable microscopic slides, besides the more humane pieces like fifteen pipes which he no longer smoked, and a battered old shaving brush which he embarrassedly confessed was useless, but his first.

My collection of hatpins, fake jewelry, old birthday cards, and a fraternity pin given to me by an unsuccessful suitor seemed comparatively normal and insignificant. Eventually, however, everything was put away, our telephone even installed, and only one week remained before John's internship would be definitely ended. And it was at this propitious moment that the problem of the automobile, or It, as we specifically named our first car, spoken in a special, agonized tone of voice, entered our lives. This mechanized monster, like a mother-in-law to some couples, or a mortgage to others, was the original inevitable thorn in our domestic progress.

It began innocently enough. One night Bob Abbott telephoned and said he would like to "drop in and see the joint."

"Swell," said John into the mouthpiece with a thorough disregard for my curiosity, "Yes. Sure thing. I will. Ha ha. You don't

say? Ha ha ha. See you soon. Good by." And he casually hung up as if he did not realize from my "Who is it, dear?" and his hands waving me off, that some of the most distressing moments in my life have been spent trying to piece together the identity of a caller, what he wants, and why, from this very illuminating type of conversation.

"All right," John finally said, laughing at my impatience. "It was Bob. He's coming right over."

"Oh, that's nice." Then I remembered: "Right now?"

John nodded.

"Just look at my hair," I exclaimed, and rushed inside to comb it.

John always says that all females are inherently endowed with the urge to "fix up," an almost involuntary, automatic reflex to the simple announcement that someone is arriving soon, and one which he cannot understand.

"A girl can't change in sixty seconds what's been happening for a lifetime," he said smugly, making his general point.

"But just think of the psychological effect of knowing that at least you've tried your best," I answered him back; "and besides," I finished, watching him surreptitiously smooth down his own hair, "you do your share of primping too."

Actually, there are many times when I am firmly convinced that all this talk of female vanity is just so much masculine propaganda, and I feel that by the time I am eighty, I will have spent some of the best years of my married life watching John shave, part his hair, re-part it, comb it, trim his mustache and do his tie over and over and over again. The difference between the sexes seems to be that the man accomplishes his "toilet" quietly and calmly, backed with an insuperable conceit that all is well in Denmark; while the woman worker does her personal share in a kind of frenzied activity, as if she were an undergraduate first-aider in the midst of a hurricane.

"No more lipstick, darling," John said, as from his vantage point on the side of the bathtub he watched me start to apply some.

"But I haven't any on at all," I protested. "See?" and I turned to show.

After a long kiss, John said: "I like you better without any make-up at all."

Recognizing this instinctively as a husband's favorite myth, I laughed. Heaven knows I have never been particularly accomplished in the art of exterior self decoration, although I have often wished I were. The only time I ever tried mascara, for instance, I accidentally got some in one eye, which caused it to redden and tear, and then, in a moment of forgetfulness, I casually rubbed them both, which made me look like a coal miner who had just emerged from the pit, and walked into a pair of the proverbial doorknobs.

Nor do my fingernails ever look like something out of a Chinese horror story, nor do my eyelashes come off at night. Sheer laziness, as well as dislike, would effectively prevent me from pursuing the type of twenty-four hour job of hard manual labor that is necessary for the scientific cosmetic effect that produces a complete, theatrical disguise.

Yet many a husband will urge his wife to strip herself of any remaining glamour, and then when she complies, be the first to say: "What's the matter with you today, dear?"

Perhaps, I thought, listening to John, it is just a type of self-protection in that he wants to see what he's really gotten. Or else, love is literally blind. So, with scarcely a glance at John's disapproving face, I made the best of what I had with what I could and was ready.

Bob, when he arrived, was the perfect guest. He not only admired our entire place, but was most enthusiastic about its weakest points. Agnes, his new girl friend, whom we had met at the hospital party, was almost as good, so that it took all of forty minutes just to show the office, with its shiny new white metal equipment on one side of the partition, and the battered old desk and books on the other side.

"A perfect setup," was Bob's verdict, after he had carefully gone over each individual instrument, like an inventory man with a tax lien.

"And we've got two whole years in which to pay it off," John boasted, although I couldn't see anything so wonderful in that. Installment buying, at best, is a necessary evil. It bestows upon the purchaser no true title to the property, coupled with all of the responsibilities and none of the privileges of ownership; and we had resorted to this method only as a last measure.

"Perfect setup," Bob repeated, and then led forward with the question of the day. "But John," he asked as if he were looking for a light switch, "where's your car?"

John and I looked startled. Sometimes, I think the final proof, if it is needed, of the existence of Divine Providence, is the fact that people like John and me, with never an ounce of practical forethought, wind up all right in the end.

"Car?" we repeated together.

"Funny," said John, "I never thought of that."

Bob groaned. I have the greatest sympathy for practical people like Bob, who have to tolerate impractical people like us. It must be somewhat like sitting in the movies, watching a highly dangerous scene, and trying to warn the unknowing hero that the villain is slinking up behind.

Then he explained. "How do you expect to get around?" he asked. "Every doctor needs a car to make calls with."

"What calls?" I answered. "We don't even have any patients yet."

"You will," Bob said with assurance. "I've heard all the older men at the hospital say that a young fellow needs a car, if only to impress the neighbors with. People won't come in if they think you're down at the mouth. They'll think you're a punk doctor. Why, John, you need a car for practice. Why don't you think it over?"

So after Agnes and Bob left, we thought it over.

"Sounds like a smart idea to me." As I plumped up the living

room pillows, I called out this pronouncement to John, who was emptying ash trays in the kitchen.

"Same here," he said, coming in to turn off the lights and lock the door. "Come to think of it, I never did see a doctor without a car. But it is expensive."

A house is always most peaceful and dearly possessed after the guests have gone and two people are alone again. Arm in arm, we walked through the darkened foyer into the bedroom.

"How expensive?" I asked, starting to undress. It was late and we were hurrying because John had to report in at six o'clock the next morning for the operating room schedule.

"Oh lots beyond the original cost," he said. "Garage, gasoline, upkeep, and things like that."

"Oh." I got into bed and pulled up the covers.

After some more talk, though, John finally said, "Look, sweetheart, it's late now. Let's sleep on it and decide tomorrow."

Sleeping on a thing is the most comfortable type of procrastination I know. Since all delay is but the well known thief of time, this method, while accomplishing nothing, is obviously no more or less effective than any.

Just before I fell asleep, I had another idea.

"John," I said, pulling at his arm, "you know what I've just thought?"

John moaned and tried to come awake. "What, dear?" he finally managed to say.

"Why, we never even remembered! Agnes came again with Bob tonight. Do you think it could possibly be taking?"

With a last groan, he went back to sleep.

The next day, I dropped into my mother's to discuss the car.

"Of course," she said, scarcely even surprised. "Your father and I wondered why you haven't bought one yet. A doctor needs one. But naturally," she finished righteously, "we didn't want to interfere."

This closing remark, which was frequently abused in the years ahead, I have come to regard as the theme song of a lost generation.

Most intelligent parents abstain from interference nowadays, with the painful reluctance of an alcoholic undergoing an involuntary cure, while completely forgetting that talk is necessary to a good family relationship, and advice is fine, just so long as there is no compulsion about either.

When John, who had been making inquiries of his own over the morning gall bladder at the hospital, arrived that night, it took us all of five minutes to vote for the car, and ten minutes more to start out to get it, as if we had decided to buy two grapefruit and crackers for breakfast.

A car! For me, if I had stopped to consider, I guess it was anything on four wheels that moved with a motor, and had a good loud horn. I also vaguely associated Henry Ford with the industry and could quote from an ignominious childhood: Chevrolet, coupé, parlay vous francay.

For John, as I now realize, it wasn't even all that. Anything on four wheels that moved would suffice. Types, prices, sizes, makes, used or new—none of these insignificant details were even remotely considered, although I do remember telling John that I like a shiny red one, and I distinctly recall his sage remark that plain black was much more suited to his profession.

"Like an undertaker," I suggested, as if it were all a matter of matching the right shade of wool.

We were both very excited by the time we got to Lincoln Road: a wedding, an apartment, and now a car. Secretly, we both cherished dreams of gliding out of any neighboring store in a glorious streamlined, chromium-plated job that would be regally elegant from front end to rear, and that in its mechanical perfection would give superb service at the stroke of a hand.

The first place we visited we chose because the cars in the show window looked nicer than those in any other store. Here was a rude awakening: it suddenly appeared that there was a basic difference between a Cadillac and a Chevy, and an even more basic difference between an eight sedan and a coupé six.

"What you want," said the salesman with obvious disgust, "is the Ford agency down two blocks to your right."

There is no greater snobbery, I thought as he turned hurriedly away, than that of the working classes serving the rich. The door-men who all but kneel, the salesladies who fuss and fawn, the butlers who take unto themselves all the dignity and superciliousness they must subconsciously wish their employers possessed.

With our spirits still high though, we searched out and found our proper medium.

"But John," I whispered as we looked around the second store, "these cars look so small and flimsy compared to the other ones we saw."

He agreed. "But look at what they cost," he whispered back.

By this time, of course, we had a hungry salesman in tow, a Mr. Reginald Percy. Mr. Percy was one of that common species of merchant men, in the emporium sense, that is, whose motto must apparently be: "Never cease firing while the customer is still conscious and standing," and who, in the thunder of their own salesmanship, always go down still trying. Now, for our benefit, he opened doors, pulled levers, pushed buttons, sat us on and off the upholstery, ("Beautiful, isn't it?") and gave a complete performance.

"So small," I whispered again to John. "How will it impress anyone?"

"But we can't afford more," he said.

"I know," I said wistfully, "but—"

"But it's got a good motor," offered Mr. Percy, who must have been eavesdropping. "Guaranteed to run smoothly."

"Oh that," I answered, brushing it quickly aside. "It's just that we wanted something really wonderful looking," I tried to explain to Mr. Percy, who was beginning to look as if his feelings were seriously wounded. "Not that these aren't nice," I said hurriedly, offering a humble pacifier, "but, you know . . ."

We all stood in a thoughtful silence. Then Mr. Percy got his

brilliant idea, for which alone he has been immortalized in our Hall of Ill Fame.

"Ah," he said, with the excited breathing of a nymphomaniac on the scent of a Robert Taylor, "I have just the thing for you."

John and I brightened visibly, like the "after" picture in a tooth-paste advertisement. "Just follow me," said Mr. Percy, and grandly led the way into the rear of the store, into what looked like a big whitewashed garage with many cars parked about. There he paused before a black automobile that stood in isolated splendor, and offered it to us with a "Hats off, the flag is passing by" gesture.

One look was enough to know that this was It. It was big and shiny and white walled tired and dripping with miles of the silveriest chromium imaginable. It had not one, but two spare tires, mounted on either side of its elegant front hood, like hundred-karat diamond earrings set on either side of a Newport matron's haughty nose. It was "dinner at the Ritz" and "Home James, please" (if dowagers say please), and box seats. To our inexperienced eyes, it was everything we wanted, and perhaps even a little more.

"What's the catch?" John asked, pressing hard on my hand.

"How much does it cost?" I could scarcely speak.

Mr. Percy, having made a dramatic entrance befitting a Barrymore, now came close, and said in a confidential tone of voice: "Now I'll tell you folks. This is a used car, not new, but just as good. Feller who had it got into just a little smash and brought it in for a trade on a Ford, but we've fixed it up like brand new, see?"

That should surely have shown us, but John and I were too busy looking.

"Six wheels," he murmured.

"With white rims," I answered.

"So," said Mr. Percy, apparently pleased with our intelligent progress, "you can get it for a song." He named a price below that of a new Ford. "It's a beautiful model, folks. Only three years old, and it'll run as good as new too."

Quickly, to make his point, he turned the key, stepped on the starter, but nothing happened. "Needs a little bit of motor work," he amended hurriedly, "but just look at that body."

Now I know that it was nothing more than a body, a big beautiful, cadaverous body with cotton stuffing for vital insides, but then all John and I could see was the shiny finish. All the precautionary maxims, legal and otherwise, that we had learned, like "Let the buyer beware," and "Look before you leap," were forgotten. Used or old, I wondered; is there a difference? Motor work well? But don't they all? The rich may worry about their phony oil wells and valueless mining stock, but for the rank and file, the Ides of March are used cars, wherein alone, of all the world, live legal tender is made out of comparative dead stiff.

In just fifteen minutes (you can see how carefully we examined this albatross that was so rapidly fastened about our unsuspecting necks), we left a substantial deposit, signed the contract Mr. Percy produced with a mere flick of his hand, like a magician bringing a rabbit out of a hat, and started to leave with the promise of delivery in a few days after "that little extra motor work."

Suddenly, on our way out, John stopped. "Oh Mr. Percy," he called.

Mr. Percy looked up in consternation.

"What make is it?" asked John.

Mr. Percy heaved a sigh of relief. "Dodge," he answered, and almost pushed us on our way home.

Two days later, we called for the car. "Here's your thirty-day guarantee," Mr. Percy said magnificently as if it were a chauffeur being thrown in for free; and to this day, my head is bowed in deep reverence for the unsung genius of that unknown mechanic who actually made it run for thirty wonderful days.

For they were wonderful days, in spite of the many unimportant difficulties that arose immediately to plague us.

First, there was the very basic business of driving.

"You do have a license?" I asked John, the day before we went to fetch our chariot.

"Of course," he answered. "Naturally, I haven't used it in years, haven't had a car. I got my junior license when I was about sixteen years old, but kept renewing it each time it expired, so it's still in good force."

"But will you be able to drive?" I wondered doubtfully.

"I think so," he said. "They say it's something you never forget, like swimming."

Except, we should have remembered, in swimming there are no trucks, traffic, pedestrians, and police.

"Oh, well," I said glibly, too busy figuring out where we would go to worry about how we would get there, "it'll probably be all right."

The first few weeks of driving were in themselves memorable, but that first drive home from the store was the epitome of stunt flying. Fortunately, just before we left Mr. Percy's emporium, he threw in a few instructions about which was the clutch, the brake, the gear shift, and the horn, or else we might not even have started. He also donated a Dodge handbook on *How to Drive and Care for your Car*, in a final gesture of generosity; and, fortified by all these, we set out to brave the wilds of Lincoln Road.

It was touch and go for the first ten blocks. Once, John missed the clutch in trying to shift, and stepped on the brake instead, causing a long line of incensed car owners behind us to stop short. Another time, at a corner, a big truck came out of nowhere while John was too busy trying to keep us rolling to notice, and I shrieked "John, a truck!" just in time to avoid an accident. When we finally reached Longview Road, we had to park three blocks from home, because that was the nearest empty block we found, and John, after thirty minutes of trying, had given up attempting to fit the car into the comparatively empty space in front of our own door.

The next two weeks or so, John underwent an intensive course in how to drive. He began by taking out the handbook Mr. Percy had bequeathed us, and reading pages one and two.

"Say," he said, stopping at this point, and glancing quickly through the rest of the book, "they make quite a business of keeping a car."

"What do you mean?" I began, then suddenly remembered my Aunt Edith who, family history said, would never have left my Uncle Harold if he had shown half the devotion to her that he lavished on that darn jalopy he owned.

"Well," John said, turning the appropriate pages, "you have to winterize a car, and then summerize it again, and keep changing the oil, and tuning the motor, and do all kinds of things. It's a terrific job."

"But not for us," I said definitely. "Throw the book away. We'll learn soon enough if something goes wrong, and that's the time to fix it."

Needless to say, we learned. Even under strict treatment of conscientious indifference, however, we discovered that a car can be like a mechanical monster with its insatiable needs; and this, although we have since successfully and happily gone through three more cars, all of which seemed to behave no better or worse than their more pampered compatriots.

But for the man who takes the car leaflet instructions seriously, a car is absolute dictatorship. He is like an overanxious mother with a problem child, and the point of diminishing returns is rapidly reached. He watches his motor with the anxiety of a hypochondriac feeling his own pulse; he frets about his fenders as if each dent were a personal injury; he oils it, and greases it, and washes it, and polishes it as if he were breathing the breath of vitamized life into its rusty nostrils. And then, after years of servitude and care, when his hair is wearing thin and his blood pressure rising high, all he has to show for his immense loyalty is fifty dollars more on the eventual trade-in.

So we did no further reading from that time on, although as a sop to his conscience, John hid the book in the uncharted depths of his desk, instead of burning it outright.

Driving, during those first few weeks, was as exciting as a roller coaster ride, if more dangerous. Each venture forth was like a mad dash into No-Man's Land and back; each safe return was like a victorious navy on its first shore leave. Compared to our daily automobile adventures, the *Perils of Pauline* were bedtime stories!

Yet in all fairness to John, I must say that he caught on fast, especially since he worked at it as seriously as if each step were a procedure of a major operation. One time, for instance, during the first week, we drove to Lincoln Road where I went into a department store to shop. When I came out, I was shocked to discover John with his jacket off and his sleeves rolled up, huffing and puffing over a tire, while heavy traffic surged all about him, and an attentive audience of two boys, one girl, and three older men followed his every movement from ringside seats.

"John," I called out, running straight through the group of murmuring spectators, "what's happened?"

He looked up and wiped his perspiring face with a dirty hand.

"Hello, darling," he answered cheerfully as if all this were a customary sight. "Nothing's happened. I'm just changing a tire."

"Oh." I sighed with relief. "Do we have a bad flat?"

Again he replied in a casual way. "No flat at all, dear. I'm just practicing how to do it, in case we ever get a real one. And I bet you I've got it down pat now!"

Another time, a few days later, a policeman almost gave John a ticket because he kept going in and out of a parking spot in order "to perfect his technique."

After the sixth time, the policeman asked: "What's the idea, Buddy? Can't you make up your mind?"

"Just practicing, officer," John answered brightly.

"Well, then, where's your learner's permit?" the man growled.

"Sure thing," John said, and produced his license instead; and I came out of a near-by store in time to see the policeman walk away scratching his head in bewilderment.

By the end of two weeks, we were veterans. Quickly, as if it had



always been so, we learned the language of the road. We could race past a changing traffic signal light with the best of them, and to do so naturally and gracefully, as if it were a legal procedure, is quite an art. We became wonderfully adept at dealing with the many police who delight in plaguing a motorist's life: Causing delays, and sweeping down out of a clump of bushes or a side road with a famous ticket for the policeman's ball for the speeder. Wherever there was a road block up ahead, John would say: "Bet you there's a cop at the root of this evil," and usually he was right. As we approached, we could see a hard-working officer, ignoring the signal lights over his head, and waving his arms frantically to create his own particular type of confusion.

Personally, I always liked the police, except when I discovered that most of them treat a driver with a minor infraction as if he were Jack the Ripper caught in the act. "Misplaced energy," John said, by way of explaining the high rate of crime. As for myself, I was all for answering their angry: "Pull up, Bub—where's the fire?" with as caustic, if also, as brilliant a remark, but John said, "No; discretion is the only way to the better side of a policeman's nature."

His approach was magnificent. How humbly he pleaded ignorance! How sweetly he conceded imaginary points! How chastened he looked, until with an exultant breath, we drove off scot free, feeling rich over our unpaid fine.

Only once did we make the fatal error of trying to excuse a passed red light with a medical emergency. John had heard that doctors had such privileges; I had heard it and was anxious to try it out, everyone else had heard it too, even Officer Clancy, but he, it was soon apparent, had heard it too many times.

"Never again," John swore as we paid our fine, and we never did.

We learned, also, to ignore the swearing and cursing that seem to be the most prevalent type of speech in driving use. There is something about the power of a moving car that changes many

ordinary, civil people into profane, egotistic despots, with little or no cause.

We even acquired an understanding of the language of the horns: the little taps that mean "Well?"—the long, loud ones that rant and rave at the slightest interruption—the middle-sized repetitious ones that say, "Go on, go on, go on," like a nagging woman.

During the third guaranteed week, feeling ourselves suitably experienced, we ventured forth into greener fields.

"Let's go to the country," I said one lovely morning. John's hospital attendance had ended, but we were waiting for the first of the next month to open shop. "It's a glorious day."

So first we stopped at a gasoline station to fill up, where we had to go through the usual routine of persuading the attendant that regular and not special gas was what we wanted. He looked at us as if we were parents caught feeding our child live caterpillars.

"That hi-test business is like grade A and B milk," John said as we swung onto the highway. "Now all milk is the same by law in New York. But because one used to cost more than the other, it was supposed to be better."

But I was too happy to care. Whenever I get in a car, I am tempted to ride on and on and leave everything behind; and then also, the heady sense of freedom and discovery filled my heart. "I hope we get lost," I told John, but knew there was little chance of that from the careful way in which he was religiously following his road map.

"John," I said finally, "let's turn here and picnic on top of this high hill. It's a beautiful spot."

Obediently, he turned right and started the climb. Halfway up, the car slowed and stopped.

"Can't it go up?" I asked, trying to push it with my will.

John tried again and again. The third time we both realized that there must be something wrong with a motor that couldn't climb an ordinary hill, but we treated it like the idiosyncrasy of a favorite relative, and simply looked for a different spot.

We found one, and parked at the side of a small, deserted country road where we spent a wonderful day in the near-by fields.

"Time to go," John said finally, and reality came back with its usual thud. We had parked in the soft shoulder of the road, popularly known as mud, and now couldn't get out. John tried going forward and backward, but with no success. Then he evolved a brilliant plan.

"I'll push," he said, "and you go hard on the gas and drive out of the rut."

"But I don't know how to drive," I reminded him.

"That's nothing," he answered. Hadn't he proved that? "But anyway, it's our only chance," he said. "Willing to try?"

So he pushed, and I went hard on the gas, and drove backwards into the nearest tree trunk, almost knocking John down at the same time.

"Darling," he shrieked, jumping away just in time, and it certainly didn't sound like a term of endearment, "are you trying to kill me?"

I giggled aloud. "But we're out," I laughed. "I did it, didn't I?"

"You sure did," he said, coming up front, "but you broke the red outer glass on one of the tail lights too."

"Oh, that!" I said, and started a long discussion on which showed up better in the dark, red or white, until we both finally agreed that it didn't matter anyway since now we had one of each.

It was after the fourth week, when the guarantee expired, that we came to recognize our car for what it was. Like a proud, beautiful but ailing lady, who has been saving face until the last guest's departure and then falls quietly to pieces, so too our motor held out on the company's time, and then slowly but surely collapsed.

It was a gradual, insidious process. We learned that it couldn't climb hills, and with deference to milady's cardiac condition, as John called it, we just avoided them.

"If you can't go up, go around," John would chant merrily as we detoured a rising street.

Then we began having a series of flats, and were shocked to learn at the place we stopped to have them repaired, that we owned six of the world's thinnest and worst tires.

"But they look so pretty," I protested when John repeated the man's statement.

"I know," John answered, "but you can't ride on the white sides."

Then the brake began to go. One day we parked at the top of a hill, and as we started away from the car, I suddenly noticed it was moving.

"John," I was really frightened, "It's rolling down."

He raced back, got in and turned the wheels so they hit up against the curb.

"Was the brake back?" I asked, running up.

"All the way," he answered, taking a deep breath. "I guess it just doesn't hold any more."

The mechanic, who was getting to be too good a friend of ours these days, said, upon consultation, that a repair job was of no avail. The whole emergency brake was worn completely through, and we'd have to pay for a new installation.

"Well," John decided after we discussed the prohibitive cost, "we'll park only on level ground from now on, and always against the curb, at least until we get the money."

So, armed with this additional handicap, we resumed our driving career. Everyone who had previously admired our beautiful automobile, now began to say "I told you so."

Bob said casually, when he heard of our experiences, "Looks like you've got a lemon," as if he were really talking about a piece of fruit instead of a car.

My mother said: "I never did like used things," and even Freda offered a mortuary of her own.

It wasn't long before everyone in speaking to us would ask before even mentioning our health: "How is your car holding up?" as if they were inquiring after a dear but sickly aunt. Even I succumbed.

When John went out on an occasional call, I would always say upon his return: "How was It?"

And he always knew what I meant. "Drove all right," he would answer, "but I heard a noise on the way back."

Eventually, he was always hearing all sorts of sounds (groans, I should say) coming out of our poor, wheezing car. He would stop the motor, pull up the front hood, and stare with absorbed fascination into its dirty, smelly depths.

"If only It were a simple man or woman patient," he would mutter, gripping It hard. His annoyance at not being able to comprehend the operation of an automobile as easily as he did a human being's would have been amusing if it weren't also costly and tragic.

Little by little, many things happened: gaskets broke, spark plugs blew, and whatever else there was to go wrong, went. Soon, John would leave the car parked on the street, and take buses and trains to his destinations, instead.

"It worries me if I ride It," he said, and I agreed.

"But anyway," I offered this as feeble consolation, "it still looks good in front of the office, and certainly ought to impress the neighbors well."

But the final breakdown didn't come until the third month. We were rolling along in our consumptive limousine, when John said suddenly, "Hear that?"

I certainly did. Loath as I was to recognize John's usual noises, I could not deny this one: it was loud and clear and rhythmical.

"You've probably got an old tin can that got caught on and is now dragging behind," I said.

John got out and looked. "Can't find a thing," he said finally.

Reluctantly, John drove on, but in the middle of the next block, the noise became louder and louder until with a final boom, and a deafening crash that sounded like a Vesuvian eruption, the car stopped still.

"Rear end broken," was the mechanic's diagnosis as he drove us

home in his truck. "Have to tow her in. Cost you a hundred dollars altogether."

We gasped. "A hundred dollars! Isn't there any other way?"

Cheerfully, he shook his head. People who complain about doctors' bills, if you ask me, ought to get a little dose of a car mechanic's estimates, and then forever hold their peace.

When the car was fixed—with no guarantee about a permanent, definite cure—we held a council of war.

"Get rid of it," Bob said.

"But how?" asked John. "No one would buy this junk heap from me."

Suddenly I laughed excitedly. "I've got it. Get rid of it the same way we got it. Trade it in for a new car!"

This idea was accepted, and we mapped out the details. In looks, our car was as elegant as the first day we saw her. Indeed, her beauty was a source of constant embarrassment when compared with what went on inside, but we knew that in the dark (it was Bob who urged a night approach) she would impress anyone. We also decided to go back to the same Ford agency since it seemed only fair turnabout. A telephone call assured us that if we went on a Thursday, Mr. Percy would be out.

"They never examine cars carefully on a trade in," Bob said. "You ought to get almost what you paid."

"Or more," I said hopefully. "Look at all the new parts she's got. *Caveat emptor*," I spoke the words solemnly, "and let the new buyer beware."

We all laughed, but then John said, "Gosh, I hate to think about the people who buy that car! I don't mind giving it back where it came from, but what about the eventual purchasers?"

"Darling," I said, "there can't possibly be two other dopes like us loose in this world, who'd buy a used car without having a mechanic check the motor!"

"Why not leave a clue?" Bob offered next. Accordingly, we

printed our motto in small, white paint at the top of the front mirror, "Get a Horse," and as John said, "If that doesn't tell them, nothing will!"

Finally, on Thursday night, we went to the store. We entered warily, feeling like fifth columnists about to blow up an ammunition dump, and only felt safer when we were reassured that Mr. Percy wasn't there.

Watching the casual examination the salesman made of our car in the dark, I could well understand how his firm got stuck with it in the first place.

"How much for It?" John asked, and I held my breath.

The man named a price only five dollars less than what we had originally paid.

"Sold," we spoke together, and forty minutes later, with all the papers signed except one to be called for the next day, we drove off in a smooth-sounding coupé. As we turned the corner, it was as if a tremendous weight had been lifted off the two of us, and we both giggled for no reason at all.

"Success!" I exulted, but I was scared. I admitted this sheepishly. Competent prevarication, whether by innuendo or actual fact is a difficult, harrowing, disturbing, exact kind of business. Comparatively, truth is not a virtue, but simply an easy way out, and many times I am sure that my honesty is only the result of an inability to lie with conviction.

"So was I scared," John said, and we laughed again.

The motor had a soft, purring sound, and this time John's handling of the vehicle bore no resemblance to a test pilot with an unruly plane.

"Look at how you drive now," I told John, as he deftly maneuvered the car through traffic. "Since we've always got to have a car, I'm glad you really know how. You know what they say: experience, meaning what's been happening to us these last few months, is the best teacher."

“And the hardest,” said John, thinking of our poor, old Dodge.

But I said, remembering it all from this novel vantage point of a comfortable, brand new car, and a pleasant but unfamiliar, sense of security: “Maybe the hardest, but oh, what a lot of fun!”

CHAPTER FIVE



Beginner's Luck

*The heights by doctors reached and kept
Were not attained by verbal fight,
But they, while other colleagues slept,
Were making housecalls in the night.*

—with apologies to H. W. Longfellow's
“The Ladder of St. Augustine”

The path of the novice is always fraught with innumerable pitfalls which, fortunately, he scarcely ever sees. The armor of youth is ignorance, and the spur of its ambition is inexperience. Self-confidence rather than knowledge carries the beginner far, and it is not until the pinnacle of success is attained and secured, that the risks, the gaping traps behind him suddenly become apparent. “Lord,” he says with proper awe, “how did I ever do it?” And he never really knows.

For the medical novice, however, the precariousness is even worse. There exists a peculiar element called “confidence in a doctor,” which serves as the basis of the physician-patient relationship, but which also acts as a hindrance to his rapid development of a clientele. It is almost as if no one person is ever willing or daringly brave enough to offer himself as the original guinea pig, and to then go

forth with a personal testimonial of his survival, encouraging others to do the same. And while, in many ways, such caution is perhaps admirable, from the point of view of a neophyte physician, it is disgusting behavior indeed.

Not that any of these weighty concerns even once remotely entered our minds at the start.

"Build a practice?" John glibly told my worried parents. "Why that's easy: Mrs. A comes in and she's pleased with my services, so she recommends Mrs. B to me, who's also satisfied. Mrs. B refers Mrs. C, Mrs. C sends Mrs. D, and so forth until I need an assistant."

I smiled happily at this wonderful logic, but my mother said pointedly, from her full share of experience and knowledge and caution and fear: "But where is Mrs. A?"

It was October first, and a full-blooded fall day. Outside, as a symbol of our imminent prestige, stood our beautiful but dumb car. Inside, everything was ready and waiting for our nonexistent practice: The foyer was brightly lit and invitingly empty. The office was white and shining and fully equipped. Those beautiful name shingles had been polished and hung only that very morning, and the smaller name plates had been carefully inserted in each front window. Even our announcements had been mailed three days before, so that the whole world, meaning the pertinent part that we knew, would be fully informed of our location, office hours, and readiness to serve. John and I sat with my parents in our living room, feverishly excited, and prepared to administer to an impatient throng.

But where, as my mother said, oh where was Mrs. A?

This statement, as the days passed by, became our jackpot question. Law school had begun for me the week before, and our routine was meticulously planned. Although I left early every morning, I was to return at twelve so as to be able to help John in the office. This aid included my services as secretary-nurse (not that I knew anything about either), and front-door receptionist (a big smile

and a kind hello), which I felt sure I could easily handle. But all that happened when I hurried home, was that John and I sat around eating swiss cheese sandwiches and looking forlornly out of the kitchen window.

"Anything?" I would ask anxiously as I entered.

"Nothing," was his usual reply.

"They don't even know we're here," I said morosely one day after our customary greetings had been exchanged, and we settled down to our swiss cheese. "Wouldn't you think that with all those people passing by, just one might come in?"

John didn't even bother to answer. He merely took another bite out of his sandwich, and worriedly watched the crowded street.

"Wouldn't you think," I went on longingly, "that just one person might fall and break a leg or something, with you right here and waiting?"

"Darling!" This time he was obviously shocked.

"Oh I'm not wishing anyone any harm," I protested, "but statistics do show that such things do happen all the time, so all I want is to have one of them happen here. See?"

Gradually, however, it was borne in upon us that opening an office was not quite like opening a grocery or a shoe store, where passers-by might notice the new shop and casually stop for a can of beer or a pair of slippers.

"If we could only get that first patient to break the ice," I said one night, when Bob stopped by to visit.

"I know," said Bob. "What you need is neon signs in red and blue flashing on and off, with arrows pointing to your door."

We all laughed.

"Or souvenirs for the first one hundred patients," I offered in the same spirit, "you know, dolls, games, with maybe half a carving set the first time, and half the next."

"Why don't we just run a penny sale?" John asked ruefully, and for a while I would have almost considered it had not fate intervened.

By this time, after one long, lost, uneventful week, the only important consideration left for office hours was the problem of trying to decide whether to keep the foyer lights on and all the doors closed before the bell rang, or to wait until someone came before we set the waiting room properly up. Economy won, of course, and even John took to leaving off his starched white coat because it only got dirty without being used.

But the day after Bob's visit, while we were eating lunch (and at last, for the first time, I realize why I hate swiss cheese now), the bell rang.

"A patient!"

Without wasting further words, we went into immediate action, like rookie firemen responding to an alarm. John raced for his white coat, that symbol of professional authority, and hid at his battle station in the office; while I flew about closing all the foyer doors, putting on the lights, and slowing down only at the front vestibule where I caught my breath, opened the door gently, and with my brightest smile said my oft-rehearsed "Good afternoon."

There stood a tired-looking woman in her middle forties.

"Is the doctor in?" she asked, and I could have kissed her sour face with joy.

"Of course," I said, trying not to seem too eager. "Won't you come in?"

At this point, like the excellent actor he is, John appeared from the office, wearing a properly dignified air. Although we had carefully discussed the idea of letting every patient sit in the waiting room for at least two minutes so as to create the proper psychological effect, a procedure highly recommended by a prominent medical magazine, and had decided to do this, it was obvious John had forgotten. In his enthusiasm, he ignored the cue, and quickly said "You're next," as he led the woman inside.

"Next to what?" I giggled silently as I walked into the treatment room and began to set up the equipment for the examination the way John had shown me. As I worked, I could hear John starting

to take the woman's case history in his most professional manner.

"Your name, please?" he asked.

"Helga Schultz," said the woman nervously.

"Age?" That was next on the file card, I knew.

"Forty-four," was the reluctant reply.

"What previous illnesses have you had?" John said then, and waited.

The woman thought and thought. "Measles," she said, "and chicken pox, as a child of course, and pneumonia last year in the hospital."

John grunted pontifically. There is something about any doctor's bedside manner that always amuses me: short doctors, fat doctors, tall doctors, skinny doctors, give them a patient, and sure enough each man will produce, with his own individual variations naturally, the proper mixture of wisdom, decorum, omniscience, omnipotence, and condescension.

Now as I listened with delight to John's version of medical manners, he said: "Oh, yes, one further question before I examine you: What sort of work do you do and what is your trouble now?"

A doctor, I am convinced, will ask almost anything in the guise of medical history, but from the relevancy of many questions I have since heard, I would attribute a great number to idle curiosity or the art of making small talk.

But Helga, who until now had seemed puzzled rather than pleased with the whole affair, spoke up with great joy. "Ach," she said eagerly, "no trouble now. I do anything you like: I cook, I clean, anything you want."

Like a well-placed time bomb, the explosion went off. "Didn't the hospital call you?" she asked innocently. "The social service department sent me over. They said you had just opened your office and might need a houseworker to help you out."

With a towel still clutched in one hand, I rushed out of the office and burst into a fit of laughter, in which John heartily joined.

"But, darling," I told him later on when I could talk again and

the bewildered Helga had left, "at least someone did come in. Maybe she'll break the ice."

And she did, but only after a fashion. The next day, and the next, nothing happened, but on the third . . .

We were sprawled across the foot of our bed that evening, in our perpetual wait, sniffing audibly. John and I had both previously decided that our quarters did not smell enough like an established doctor's office, and we had spent the afternoon trying to get a more medicated odor in the place.

"What we need is a real hospital smell," John had said, and I had agreed.

"The nauseating, hard to breathe, antiseptic kind, you mean," I had suggested. "What we've got here is that new furniture polish and broiled lamb-chop odor, which certainly isn't becoming."

So all afternoon, we methodically sprayed two cans of ether, a bottle of ST 37 disinfectant, and a liberal supply of Lysol all over the house.

"But I can't breathe," I yelled, when we had finished.

"Neither can I," gasped John.

We hurriedly flung open the windows for better ventilation, only to find, after the respiratory difficulty ceased, and we had gone out and re-entered to test the odor, that instead of being overwhelmed by a professional hospital smell, nothing was left but the furniture and food.

"Maybe some antiseptic is still left," John began as we lay resting that night, hopefully trying to sniff some remnants of our efforts in the air; "but—"

Just then the doorbell rang.

"John!" I popped up like a firecracker at a match. "Your coat's in the kitchen. Grab it!"

Again, as on that first occasion, we flew to our posts, lighting lamps, closing doors, like soldiers answering a bugle call to battle.

Finally, with marvelous self control, I opened the door.

"Good evening," I told the little old man on the step, and regally

led the way to the foyer where he promptly sat. Then I went into the office, where John had retreated, and delivered my message to Garcia.

"It's a man," I stage-whispered to John.

"A patient?" he whispered back.

"I don't know," I said. "He looks bad enough to be one but that's no sure sign. At any rate," I finished, crossing my fingers, "he can't be looking for housework."

After a suitable period of time had elapsed (this time we followed the rules although heaven only knows what good psychological effect our poor little waiting room could produce on anyone), John came out and said to the man, "You can come in now, sir," and sat behind his desk to wait.

Mr. Wilkinson, that was his name, walked slowly in and looked carefully about as he approached. But this time John was forewarned.

"And what can I do for you, Mr.—?" John paused expectantly.

"Wilkinson," was the immediate reply. "Adam Wilkinson, but just you sit down and take it easy, young feller," he went on shaking John's hand. "I heard there was a new doctor in the neighborhood, and I thought I'd drop right in and look you over. After all," he finished with a twinkle in his eye as John and I collapsed in near-by chairs, "you never really know when you might need a doctor, do you?"

After that, I think, we wouldn't have been surprised if Father Divine himself had dropped in next to have some blackheads squeezed. "Although," as I tried to tell John, "someone knows we're here, anyhow. There's hope."

Not that we were in actual oblivion. Our telephone was our main connection with the outside world, even if it was often more a means of torture than communication. For days, I had practiced saying "Dr. B's office," over and over again in the same kind of professional sing-song telephone voice I had heard used in other offices, but the phone hardly ever rang.

"Oh it's only you," I would say with disappointment to my mother, coming down from my secretary's monotonous monologue as I recognized her greeting over the wire.

"Well," she would say, immediately hurt; "and whom did you expect?"

"Nobody, really," I would say appeasingly, "but I did hope for a patient."

We watched the telephone hawkishly, regarding it like the last lifeline extended to a sinking ship; and as if it were aware of our scrutiny by some despicable type of feminine intuition, it responded with a host of wrong numbers and salesmen's approaches. Eventually, we came to recognize it as a despotic instrument, but one whose power must be respected and served, even if despised.

That night, however, after Mr. Wilkinson's departure, I rebelled at our slavery.

"Waiting for someone to come during office hours is bad enough," I told John. "But waiting for this phone to produce a house visit is a twenty-four-hour job."

"A doctor's telephone must be answered any time of day or night," John sounded like Rule No. 162 out of an Army Guidebook. "But, darling, some day when we can afford it, we'll get the Answering Service, and we'll be free."

"And in the meantime, how about a little ice cream soda down at the corner drug store?" I pleaded. "It'll only take three minutes. Surely no one will call then, especially when they never have yet. Staying here to catch a ring is like being in prison. Even in school, I feel like a parolee out on good behavior."

"What about a front door emergency?" John asked.

"We'll hang a little sign on the front saying: 'Back in two minutes. At corner drug store.' That should tell them. Please John," I begged. "We haven't really gone out much for anything in ages."

So with the sign hung, we ran down the street, gulped a soda, and started back in two and a half minutes.

"See?" I began triumphantly to John, as we neared our house, but then I stopped. The phone, that dirty, tyrannical, heartless traitor was ringing loudly and clearly through the opened bedroom window. We both broke into a quick run, but John said, after a hurried search: "I can't find my key."

Frantically, we tried the door, but it was firmly locked.

"Get in the bedroom window," I said, turning towards it. "It'll be nearer since there's an extension in there."

The telephone was still ringing.

Unfortunately, the bedroom window was only partly open, about fourteen inches to be exact, and it was fastened at this point by a complicated safety device. John got his bulk halfway in and then got stuck.

"I can't make it," he panted, and it took both of us, yanking hard, to pull him back out.

The telephone still was ringing.

"I'll go, I'm smaller," I said. This time, we were successful, and I fell with a heavy thud to the floor. I picked myself up and ran for the phone but just then it stopped ringing.

"Hello, hello, hello," I screamed and banged at my merciless tormentor, but it was as dead as the churchyard in Goldsmith's "Deserted Village."

"Didn't catch it?" John asked as I let him in the front door.

I shook my head. "I'm sorry John," I said feeling guilty and ready to weep with anger at the nasty phone, "I guess it's all my fault."

"It doesn't really matter," he tried to console me. "Probably somebody wanting to sell me a subscription to *Popular Mechanics*."

"Do you really think so?" I asked hopefully.

But the next morning, a telephone call from old Dr. Kreutzman, squelched that. "Where were you?" he demanded in booming tones. "A fractured leg came into the emergency room last night and wanted a private doctor so I tried and tried to get you. No answer. I finally sent it to Saunders."

This time I really cried. "We watch it like a devoted mother with a sick child," I wept, "and the first time we turn our backs for a couple of little minutes, look at what it does."

That very night, however, as if to reinforce our waning courage, we came wonderfully close to the McCoy. After an even more depressing day than usual, with never even a tiny peep out of the door or phone, the front bell rang at midnight, a time we have both come subsequently to recognize as the most awful moment to be disturbed, during the deep, blissful comfort of that first, sound sleep.

"Emergency!" we breathed excitedly, hopping out of bed.

Now any old timer in medical practice who has personally reached the peak of success in his calling, as symbolized by his emphatic refusal to answer any night calls at all, even if General Eisenhower himself were to make them, always preaches emergencies to the struggling newcomer. "Upon such an occasion," the gospel tells, "when time is of the essence, and blood is flowing, the patient can't stop to bother about whether he likes Dr. Wilson better than Dr. Black. He will turn to any doctor—even you—as the nearest succor in his moment of need. And from this patient's gratitude, your practice is made."

"Sounds to me," said John when he first heard it, "like a good way for Dr. Wilson and Dr. Black to insure their own good night's rest; but beggars can't be choosers, and I'll take anything."

It was therefore with glorious visions of gory injury, meaning anything from an enucleated eye to a gunshot wound, although I might have settled for a dangling arm, that I tied my robe and rushed to open the door. Alas! There stood an enormous dog who was an obvious first cousin to a giant dinosaur, with his owner, a big, blond annoyingly healthy-looking boy of eighteen. As I slid from view before this spectacle (and in complete honesty I must confess that a midget Pekinese would have produced a similar effect), John took over and said: "What is it?"

Vainly I searched for some obvious hurt as the boy stepped closer to speak. "My dog bit me," he said, and I brightened hopefully.



"When?" asked John.

"Yesterday," was the innocent reply.

How well I can recall my shocked indignation as I heard him casually explain his midnight visit! And how amused I can be today, as I realize from my greater experience that emergencies usually mean either a patient who can't sleep and doesn't see why the doctor should either, or a man who has finally consented to a medical examination and doesn't care what time it is, or a nervous woman in need of psychological reassurance. But then, I knew no compromise.

"Well, you see," the boy went on hurriedly, suddenly seeming to grasp what time it was, "Tiny's bitten me many times before, but I got to wondering tonight if maybe she might have rabies, so I got scared. And I thought you could take a quick look at her, and let me know, because if you think so, I'll need treatment."

A bargain's a bargain, I began to think pleasantly, until John, after a cursory glance at the quiet, intelligent-looking animal, said: "Well, I don't know too much about dogs, but this one seems all right."

At which the fond owner offered eagerly, "She is beautiful, isn't she?" as if it were two o'clock in the afternoon and we had stopped at a pet show (horse show, I should say, judging from size) to admire a pedigree.

"But," John continued, completely ignoring the interruption, "you'd better take her over to the vet or the Department of Health tomorrow just to play safe. If you'd like, though," he finished hopefully, looking at the nasty scratch bite the boy had shown, "I'll be glad to cauterize your wound with nitric acid. Keep it from getting infected."

I might have forgiven him anything had he at least consented to that, but the boy hurriedly shook his head and began backing out.

"No thank you," he said politely, as if he were refusing a second helping of pie à la mode, "but if it's not rabies, I'll just do what I always do when she bites me—put a little iodine on, and let it alone."

By this time, he had reached the open door. "Good night," he called and bolted.

Shivering with cold, we both crawled back into bed, and huddled close for comfort. "Well, that was almost a real patient," I said reassuringly to John. "Darling, I think that we're finally getting warm."

But the next day nothing happened, and for the first time we began to faintly glimmer the doubt and distrust that my mother always discussed. Not that we actually worried, as such, heaven forbid! But we were just a little more impatient and uneasy than before, although still totally oblivious of the slim wing and a prayer we were drifting in on.

Even my mother's daily telephone call, or visit, if she had time to spare, grew more and more frantic. "No one at all?" she would repeat sadly, and then add in that false, cheerful "You'll get well soon" voice that doctors use to the moribund: "But don't worry, dear. Something's bound to happen tomorrow."

Freda, too, was wonderfully sympathetic. "If only my Karl would hurt himself," she said yearningly. "He always does, but now when you need it, he doesn't. And he always goes to the doctor in the building when it happens."

At first I was shocked at the brutal idea. Then I said: "But Freda, we wouldn't take any money from you in any case," since neither John nor I had any illusions about a superintendent's salary.

"Of course not," she laughed at my ignorance. "When my old man gets hurt—and I don't make him do it, but he's always bound to twist his back shoveling coal or slip when clearing the ice, nothing serious you see—well it's always a compensation case. Nobody pays." This blunt summation of the millions of dollars expended annually to and for injured workmen startled me then, but actually it is the average employee's impression of the workmen's compensation laws.

But Freda meant well. "Maybe," she finished, patting my hand sympathetically, "any day now Karl will do it again!"

Gert Shaw, during one of the hospital crowd's visits, offered to shoot some of the "buzzards" passing in the street, to get us some "God-damned business," while Bob volunteered to get sick himself; and all of it was good for a laugh, if nothing else.

It was during this lull, also, that we first made our acquaintance with the backbone of the medical profession, those unsung, unknown heroes of the trade: the detailmen. A detailman, as he is technically called, is a visiting representative of a drug concern, or a pharmaceutical establishment, or a surgical instrument and truss appliance company. He calls on his list of doctors at regular intervals, in the territory to which he has been assigned. His job is not to force sales to the doctor directly (an epic type of self-restraint that always makes him welcome), but just to publicize his company's particular brand by means of well-rehearsed sales talks, punctuated by the bestowal of free samples, or pertinent literature, or both. He is uniformly neat in appearance, dignified in demeanor, and generally, with his sartorial elegance and leather briefcase, the perfect inhabitant for a doctor's waiting room, guaranteed to impress any other patients who might be waiting there with the high calibre of the particular physician's practice.

The first detailman who came to our door was a revelation.

"He looks like a colleague," I told John bewilderedly, "or a banker."

After our previous disappointments, both of us were unusually wary with all newcomers, and I found myself answering the bell with a belligerent: "Are you a patient? Convince me!" attitude, instead of my former expectant one.

Mr. O'Leary was neither a banker nor a doctor, but when he left, after an hour's visit, we were happy to have met him, and anxious for all the others of his calling. Although the samples he left were of no earthly use to us, since neither John nor I, thank God, were suffering from hemorrhoids or gonorrhea, and the literature he donated was equally valueless since it was so hopelessly prejudiced in his company's favor, it had been a refreshing visit. He could talk

shop with John like a fellow practitioner, offer accounts of interesting gossip about the rest of the medical world, deliver choice bits of practical advice, and bring measureless comfort and encouragement with case histories of the struggles of other, now successful, colleagues. Of course, as John's practice grew, so the length of Mr. O'Leary's visits decreased proportionately, but the close bond and free samples always remained.

"Aren't detailmen nice?" I asked John a few days later, after four more had come.

"Wonderful," he agreed. "If they could only pay the rent!"

"Someone's got to come in soon," I answered quickly. "I mean a real, live patient. After all, things can't go on like this forever."

And they didn't, although the real patient when he turned up very, very early the next morning, didn't look convincingly alive.

We were still asleep when the crash came from the near-by corner.

"Do you think it's an accident?" I murmured sleepily to John.

"Not here," he answered, hardly opening one eye. "Around this office, medicine takes a holiday," and he went to sleep again.

But I was unable to doze off so easily. Instead, I began to think and think, until suddenly, I remembered a conversation I had had with Freda the day before.

"You've chosen a marvelous spot for a doctor's office," she said. It was one of the times she was being kind enough to come in and listen for the telephone, in case it should ring, while I went out with John for some air. After that unforgivable treachery when it had been only momentarily abandoned, John and I kept constant vigil over our telephone, like a ship in enemy waters holding twenty-four-hour watch. Consequently, since our dedication was complete, we would have been literally buried alive were it not for Freda's fateful intervention.

"I'll stay," she had said one fine day, urging me out.

"But," I had hesitated, "we can't pay anything at all."

She had been plainly annoyed. "Who wants pay?" she demanded.

"When I want a job, I'll look for it. You go," she had finished, so we gratefully went.

But her pronouncement, the day before, about our fine location, had irked me.

"Marvelous spot," I repeated her words glumly. "It hasn't been so good yet."

"But it is," she maintained. "That corner outside is the meanest in the world. They're always having accidents there. What they need is a cop stationed, or a traffic light. But in the meantime, a doctor can earn a fortune just on that corner alone."

Some fortune, I thought, tying a ribbon in my hair and turning to go: maybe for a skillful pickpocket! But listening to the gathering clamor outside, this very next day, I reconsidered her words and woke John again.

"Something must have happened," I told him, shaking his arm excitedly. "Freda said things always do out there. Just listen to the noise."

Reluctantly, he sat up and listened.

"Maybe they'll need a doctor," I urged him on, trying to get him out of bed.

He stretched his arms instead, and sighed. "Not in view of past precedents," he said.

"But maybe they will," I persisted.

"All right," he agreed finally, swinging his legs out from under the covers, "just to satisfy you, let's take a look through the blinds."

I was at the window before he could get there, and after a fast glance through a raised bottom slat, I called: "Darling, what a mob! Just look!"

"Something sure has happened," he agreed, looking too.

Although we both knew that a city crowd might mean anything from a found dime or a pricked finger to a bank robbery or a case of rape, we were still impressed.

"Won't they call an ambulance, though?" John asked, thinking aloud.

"I don't know," I breathed excitedly, all full of opportunity knocks but once, and seize the day, "but let's hurry and dress anyhow just in case they—"

But already it was too late: As I spoke the doorbell rang.

"What'll I do?" John was in his pajamas, and his calm disintegrated like butter in a hot pan.

"Lordy," I shrieked, pulling on my robe, "stick your white office jacket over your pajamas. How else can you look professional? And go inside. I'll let them in."

Like Florence Nightingale rising to the battle call, I went bravely to the door, and with me walked Patrick Henry, Joan of Arc, and Dr. Kildare.

There was a crowd waiting there as I opened the door, a loud, tremendous, thrilling crowd, and up in front: The Body. Three men, looking importantly like proud, sad pallbearers of a king, were carrying a thin, white-haired, old man, who lay across their arms with closed eyes and a white face; while all four were escorted by Officer Kelly out of a passing police car.

I, whose closest association to any type of human destruction or suffering, had been a dissected earthworm in biology, was terribly afraid to look.

"Is he dead?" I whispered fearfully, turning as pale as the victim.

"Of course not," the policeman said, as if I should have known better, "or else we'd a called for the mortuary bus."

With quick shame, I attempted to remember that I was now a functioning unit of a first-aid group, and tried to look professional.

"Clear the way," Mr. Kelly now shouted, although everybody was behind and not before. "And all of you, move on, move on," he turned around and yelled, which shows, I suppose, that he really knew where the people were.

As the crowd began reluctantly to disperse, Mr. Kelly turned back to me, and starting the procession moving forward again, asked: "Where'll I put him?"

It was too much like the time the furniture company had delivered the bedroom suite, and had also wanted to know where to put it, but with my new sense of responsibility, I solemnly led the way into John's office, where he had been impatiently waiting.

"Lay him on the examining table," John took over eagerly, and I gladly relinquished my post.

"Excelsior," I thought, as I watched him run about gathering injectibles and syringes, "a real patient, and almost alive!"

"What do you think it is, Doc?" the first pallbearer asked, obviously pleased with the whole catastrophe and his special place in it.

"Well, he's out," John answered, not stopping his work. "Could be concussion, fractured skull, or just plain shock."

Conscientiously, I tried not to hope for the worst.

"How'd it happen?" I asked, trying to divert my mind.

Here, everyone spoke together, eager to deliver his pet version.

"Well, I was right there," the second pallbearer began.

"This car comes up," said the first pallbearer, "and it hit the—"

"That old man wasn't even looking where—" was the third's contribution.

But Officer Kelly thundered them into silence with his sudden show of authority. Then he turned to me.

"Well, miss," he started, and I liked him just for that. After marriage, there seems to be some innate compliment implied every time one is mistakenly assumed to be unmarried. Or maybe it's just a kind of subtle flattery, implying youth and good wear to the recipient.

But Officer Kelly was set on telling his story. "It wuz like this," he said. "Old geezer stepped out in front of the car—five witnesses say so. And then he goes out like a light even though he wasn't really hit, since the feller in the car swerved and ran into the lamppost to miss him. And here we are."

After a respectful silence, I asked, "Who is he?" and Mr. Kelly obliged again.

"No identification on him at all," he announced ponderously. "Not a clue. Just a dollar and some change."

Just then, the doorbell rang again, and with due appreciation for this unusual popularity, I went to admit the new caller. It was Father Giovanni from the parish house up the next block.

"I heard there was an accident," he said as he entered, "and I came immediately."

Throughout the time we lived on Longview Road, Father Giovanni became a frequent visitor in cases just like this.

"Of course, Father," I said, leading the way, "it's a poor old man. He's right in here."

As we came into the room, John was administering a stimulant to the unconscious victim, while Mr. Kelly, and his three unofficial deputy assistants, undertook immediately to bring Father Giovanni up to date.

"It doesn't matter who he is," the priest finally decided. "I will administer the rites anyhow."

And he began his ritual although careful not to interfere with John's ministrations.

"His pulse is stronger now," John said, counting the beat. We all stopped still and watched the poor, thin, white face and the closed eyes expectantly. The priest's murmuring words moved softly into the silent room, and a feeling of pity and sympathy for the unknown sufferer made me completely forget his role of original patient.

"He's coming round, I think," John said excitedly, and we all stood at attention. Only Father Giovanni continued his work.

Suddenly, as I held my breath, the old man opened his eyes, and gradually, recognition came into them. Slowly, and in obvious bewilderment, he looked at each one of us, until his eyes lighted finally on the murmuring priest.

"Oy, mein Gott," he shrieked, jumping with unbelievable speed and vitality off the table. "A priest, a priest!" and like a flash of lightning ran out of the room and house.

It all happened so unexpectedly, and so quickly, that for a few

seconds after he left, we all just stood and stared stupidly at the place where he had been. Then Officer Kelly roared like an enraged bull and rushed out of the house, with his three self-appointed deputies immediately behind. Father Giovanni, after the first shock, straightened up and smiled.

"I must have looked like the devil himself to that poor old man," he said philosophically. Then he introduced himself more properly to John and me, and gathered up his things, and went.

Everything was over so suddenly, and rapidly, that after we were left alone, I didn't know quite what to say.

"I guess," I began, but as I turned to John, I burst instead into uncontrollable laughter. After all our elaborate precautions, and painstaking rehearsals, to be caught like this! John's hair was wild from sleep and half up in the air. His starched white coat was primly buttoned over his wrinkled pajamas, and with the startled expression on his unshaved face, he looked like Smokey Stover out of the comic strip.

"I can't help it," I giggled, making him look in the mirror to see what I meant. "Aren't we the epitome of professional dignity?" and I pointed wordlessly to the curlers in my hair, the informal bathrobe over my nightgown, and my face without any makeup at all.

Finally, we both collapsed onto the living room couch, where we sprawled contentedly.

"At last, I felt like a doctor again," said John.

"You bet," I answered. "A first real patient."

John sighed happily. Then suddenly, he jerked up straight, as if stabbed. "Say," he gasped, "We weren't paid. He didn't pay!"

Hurriedly, we ran to the front door and looked out, but the street was as peaceful as if nothing had ever happened, and as dead as Bluebeard's unfortunate wives.

"Oh well," I said, as we closed the door. "It doesn't matter really. All that counts is that we're off at last. Darling, the ice is cracked!"

And verily, that day marked the end of the beginning.

CHAPTER SIX



From Little Acorns

*The owl and the pussycat (you and me)
Went out in a leaky boat:
We found some honey,
And made some money,
And actually kept afloat.*

—with apologies to Edward Lear's
"Owl and the Pussycat"

Compared to the gradual development of a medical practice, the centuries-long evolution of man seems like a study in jet propulsion. But, on the other hand, compared to the renewed miracle of individual accomplishment, from Cinderella down to the Duchess of Windsor, all history, Darwinian, international, or otherwise, becomes as obscure and unimportant as last week's wash.

It was quite understandable, therefore, when my mother said one day recently: "Doesn't it make you especially happy to know that you started from scratch, and really succeeded?"

• She spoke in the true American "You too can be President" tradition, but I was unimpressed. For my money, the well known road to success is as thorny as ever, and the modern man who makes his own way just has no better alternative.

"Not especially," I replied seriously. "That business about the harder the toil the sweeter the reward is just so much bosh. When I work for a thing, I expect to get what I've earned. It's when I don't work, or expect something, that it thrills me most, like a surprise present. But, of course, things like that hardly ever happen."

John, who had come in while I was speaking, laughed. "I agree with you," he said, sitting down on the floor beside my chair. "But it looks as if success will always demand its pound of flesh. And, anyhow, once it's been paid off in hard work, as we have done, at least it will always give us something to talk about."

I laughed also, for this was definitely true. If added struggle does not actually flavor the reward, it certainly pays its way in stronger bonds. What a cherished mutual heritage is to the greatness of a nation, so a common cause, especially a successful one, can similarly be to the ties of a family.

But back in our early days, before we could afford to sit back and leisurely discuss the worth of ambition, John and I discovered that all progress is dishearteningly slow. After that hectic, ridiculous start, things moved steadily forward, but not in the cataclysmic fashion we had idyllically anticipated. Mrs. A., when she materialized, was not enough, nor were Mrs. B. and Mrs. C. and Mrs. D. either.

"I never realized how many people it takes to build a good, substantial medical practice," I told John one night. We were sitting in the kitchen having milk and cold pie before going to bed. He had a medical journal spread before him, and I had my law cases for the next day's assignment open wide too, but of course, that didn't hinder our conversation.

"It takes time, darling," said John, and I sniffed at the cliché, although it was offered self-consciously and with a full awareness of its value. Heaven knows that time and rolling snowballs and pennies that take care of dollars are no consolation when you don't have any to begin with.

"The trouble is," he went on, "that a patient may be on your regular list, but he isn't really a patient until he gets sick. Therefore,

a doctor needs a tremendous turnover, so that by the law of averages he will have enough sick ones at any given moment to keep him busy."

This made me giggle. "They don't have to be really sick, either," I laughed, and he knew to what I referred.

One of the greatest revelations after my marriage was the discovery that most of the patients who visit a doctor's office are comparatively well people. I don't know exactly what I expected, whether it be epileptic convulsions in the waiting room or gory hemorrhages in the treatment room, but I do know that I would never before have deemed it possible that intelligent men and women (which they are!) would actually seek professional attention for minor complaints like headaches and colds, content to pay the appropriate fee for the meager aid offered.

"It's incredible," I told John. "You doctors have the whole country sold on a phony idea of how wonderful medicine is, when in reality, as you yourself admitted, many illnesses can't even be diagnosed properly, and many, many more, although labeled, can't be cured."

I remembered with pride our own medical history at home. Nothing but a genuine pneumonia, or a fourteen carat disease of any kind, merited the calling of a physician, and it was *not* sheer economy either.

"Doctors like to sound important," my mother would say with unusual insight, "but I can watch and wait as well as any of them, and pray too."

So we were home-baked and dosed with anything from aspirins, mustard plasters, and Dr. Brown's liniment, to hot drinks, castor oil and Rem, although such treatment, compared to what goes on in the average medical office, was tantamount to drugless faith healing.

"I can't understand," was my habitual theme. Judging from the regular file of sniffles, lethargy, despondency, headaches, and almost any kind of vague unhappiness that seemed to be sufficient ground for the needless expenditure of a doctor's fee, I began even-

tually to believe that most patients arrived either because they honestly expected miracles, or just plain had no better place to go.

"Another cold!" I exploded one day, after the fourth in a row had left. "I thought everyone in the whole world knew that there isn't any cure discovered for the common cold. Even the *Reader's Digest* hasn't announced one yet, and they always anticipate the American Medical Association by years."

John thought I was being funny. "I give them some relief, don't I?" he asked.

"Nothing they can't get at home for free," I persisted. "When we get colds here, you always say: 'Just take it easy. There's nothing else to do.' And that's all we take."

Then John grew serious too. "Say," he said, grabbing me playfully by the shoulders, "are you trying to bite the hand that feeds us? What are you trying to do, scare off the little practice we've got? Darling, promise me you won't start talking like this in public. Promise?"

I promised, simply because I am a very practical person, and know better than to look a gift horse in the mouth. But I was unconvinced, until the time one venerable physician told me, after John's private disclosure of my point of view: "My dear girl; headaches, backaches, and such ailments are the mainstay of any doctor's practice. If we were to limit ourselves to treating either real illnesses or even disorders that can be actually cured, the need for medical men would be cut in half, and the other half would starve. And then," he finished with a twinkle in his eyes, "everybody on both sides of the fence would be much more unhappy."

Now, as I took another gulp of milk, I repeated to John: "For purposes of practice, just so long as they think they're sick, is enough, isn't it?" and I laughed again.

But that set John off on another tangent. "That reminds me," he said, and I sat up straight and waited. "I've been meaning to speak to you about just that."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well, it's this way. We'll get a good-sized practice going, I've no doubt about that. Perhaps sooner, perhaps later,—but—"

"Sooner," I interrupted fervently, "if it's all the same to you. Another installment's due next week on the equipment, you know."

He knew. "But about practice," he continued. "From the little I've seen of it, it looks like a very tame business, especially after the hospital work I put in."

That was unanimous. How could Mrs. Miller's rheumatism or Mr. Harvey's stiff neck compete with the compound fractures and complicated operations that were routine fare in a large, general hospital? I had heard many former interns complain at the unjust incongruity of an educational system that prepares its men to perform heroic surgical maneuvers and diagnose difficult diseases and then lets them loose to lance simple boils and administer to chronic sinusitis. The adjustment from institutional medicine to private practice seemed to be generally extremely hard to make, and I had long been aware of John's personal problem. I hesitated, therefore, to speak.

"But darling," I finally said, "even though the daily grind is dull, you can't change that, can you?"

"No," he admitted, "but I think there is a way out."

I looked up, expectantly. "How?"

"Clinics," was his prompt reply. Doctors who like to pose as altruists, and who point to their free clinic service as proof, break no ice with me. If it weren't for the experience involved, the chance for further advancement from this lowliest medical stepping stone, and the consequent professional prestige, the public dispensaries today would be almost completely unserved by the physicians.

"I'd like to start putting in time at the clinic next week," he said, "and that way I'll see plenty of work. And maybe someday, you never can tell, I might even get promoted from the clinic to an appointment on the inside hospital staff. That's where the big things are done."

I hated to hear him say that. Hospital politics, John had always

said, would make the dirtiest Tammany deal look like a Salvation Army meeting. The unreasonable, spasmodic, periodic hiring and firing of the lower by the top few bore too close a resemblance to a Nazi purge for my comfort. But if that was what he had determined upon, there was little to do but work and try.

I finished my cake and went over to kiss him. "John," I said cheerfully, "you start next week at the clinic, and some day it'll be chief of staff. After all, it takes just a few easy scenes in the movies, and on the radio, Jim Brent does it faster yet. But you and me, we'll show them that truth is better than fiction!"

John laughed. "Chief of staff is a title used only on the radio, sweetie. Technically, it doesn't exist. But thanks, anyway, for what you mean," and he kissed me too.

None of this, however, solved the problem of collecting patients in greater bulk, a dilemma that still remained. We rapidly decided that the major hindrance in building a practice was the absence of a practice to begin with; and, in this, we were very much like the young girl whom nobody will employ because she has no experience.

"A vicious cycle," Bob agreed when we expounded this theory during one of his regular visits. "Have you tried the county society for any help?"

This innocent remark caused me to roar and it took five minutes before I could calm down and enlighten Bob. John, of course, saw no joke. Like most of his colleagues, he belonged to that fraternity and accepted it implicitly. But for myself, as an attorney and careful observer unbound by any false faith, the actual association and its functioning were a horrible disappointment. The county medical society is my pet grievance and joke. When one stops to compare the actual, impotent character of this organization with its ballyhooed, pompous reputation, all done without press agents either, it makes some of Russell Birdwell's most intricate Hollywood machinations seem like a Sunday school rally. Custom, and erroneous legal and public opinion have attributed to this group the power of searching out and placing the stamp of approval upon a

physician's qualifications, ethics, and abilities. "Are you a member in good standing of your county medical society?" a question almost always propounded to a doctor-witness in a court of law, has assumed the significance of: "Are you licensed to practice medicine in this state?" and "Are you listed in *Who's Who in American Medicine*?" While a negative reply is often mistakenly regarded as an admission of anything from quackery to illegitimacy.

In reality, the term "in good standing" means that the member's dues have been paid in full for that year, as so stated on his membership card. As for membership itself, many an abortionist has been elected to this doubtful honor, when he was discreet enough to keep out of jail, tactful enough not to boast of abortifacient as his specialty on his application blank, and persuasive enough to induce two professional member-pals (what doctor hasn't two friends?) to endorse his form. In fact, if he desires further doubtful prestige, this time of a national character, he has but to subscribe to the *A.M.A. Journal* for eight dollars a year, whereupon he will automatically become a member of the American Medical Association.

"So that's how it works," said Bob, when I finished my tirade in spite of John's obvious disapproval. "I see."

"No you don't," I replied with a smile, "or if you do it won't make any difference. It won't be long before you're the 'member in good standing' sitting next to John at the meeting."

"She's a disturbing influence," said John jokingly changing the subject. "But let's get back to building a practice."

"Oh, that," said Bob, "well, the important thing is to look busy. It's poor psychology to let a patient sit alone in a waiting room. She invariably begins to think: 'If nobody else uses this doctor, maybe I'm making a mistake in coming here too.' And by the time she goes inside the treatment room, she's doubtful, distrustful, and unhappy, convinced that you're not a good doctor and unwilling to give you a chance to disprove it."

From personal experience, I knew that this was so: A woman in an empty butcher shop immediately disparages the freshness and

quality of the meat because no one else is buying, and the deserted restaurant is similarly boycotted.

"But how can we help it?" I asked. "Every time my folks or friends visit, and we have a patient around, we always make them sit in the waiting room to look like more business. But where can we cull the genuine multitude from?"

Bob thought hard. "What about the people you know?" he finally asked.

I groaned aloud, and John answered: "Oh, that's old advice!"

All new doctors, and lots of not so new ones who just never outgrow the habit or really build a practice, socialize. To socialize means that the particular practitioner is to diligently dig up anyone ever known from birth onward and fraternize with him or her or them in the hope of cementing the acquaintanceship into a medical contact. So much of such socialization is done, in fact, that I would like to take this opportunity to warn people everywhere: "Beware the new doctor bringing friendship. His eye is probably fastened hopefully on your appendix or your unborn child, rather than your sudden social glamour." Many a young physician, however, has successfully built his practice on this type of tactical maneuvering or, too, on a church congregation, although as far as I was concerned, this latter operation has always smacked too much of the thirty pieces of silver.

"We tried socializing at the very beginning," John told Bob with a big grin, "but it didn't work out so well. Our relatives are healthy anyhow, and most of our friends are doctors. As for the few who weren't—"

I started to giggle. The few who weren't had been rounded up by John and me at the onset, and religiously invited over, like a Bowery politician digging up live votes.

And they came! Big, little, fat, likable or not, never will I forget how they came!

"Hmmm," said the first visitor, a broken-down businessman with big ideas. "Not such a bad little place you've got here, not bad

at all." His deprecating glance and careless words reduced it to that famous shanty in old Shanty Town.

"Yes," said his wife, a stout, dumpy, overdressed woman (or is it my subconscious protest?) "not so bad. But," and she paused dramatically, "do you know Dr. Winters on Park Avenue? No?"

We shook our heads and smiled painfully.

Undiscouraged, she continued. "You should see *his* place. Plush and magnificence. Always jammed. Have to wait all day to see him. He's got six nurses and ten rooms. Why, he'd never have time to sit around like you, his telephone rings *every single minute!*" She finished by pointing at John, who by then was feeling less important than a buck private next to a top sergeant.

"Well, of course, Dr. Winters is something big," her husband offered condescendingly, "but some day, you may get there too, young fellow."

If he eats Ironized Yeast for breakfast and takes bubble baths at night, I felt like adding; and I wondered as I watched him thump my poor, squirming John on the back, if that phony tycoon would ever figure out why they weren't ever asked back here again.

The second arrival, a few nights later, was a struggling lawyer who had an axe of his own to grind.

"You," he said to John, after he settled himself on our sofa, "are the right kind for me to know. After all, as a doctor, you must see thousands of people in your practice"—at this point I choked on my pretzel—"and I thought maybe you could see your way to sending them to me when they need legal advice. I really would appreciate it no end, because it's awfully hard on a young fellow these days," he finished apologetically, as if we didn't know.

It was with definite, mounting apprehension that I prepared for our third visitor the next night.

"We're not impressing them enough," I told John after thinking it over. "They want Dr. Kildare atmosphere, and for all the excitement here, they might be visiting a coal miner on strike. Can't we pep it up?"

"I'm sick of what people expect of a doctor," said John. "A medic is supposed to work from dawn to dawn with no time off for food or rest or sleep, although why anyone thinks a doctor's physical makeup is any different from anybody else's, is something I don't understand. If an M.D. ever followed the routine the public set up for him, he'd be crippled at thirty, and dead at forty."

"Agreed," I answered promptly, "but you can't reeducate a whole world. And we've got a goal of our own." I liked to think that I was being "the dear little wife, helping her husband get on," a much abused piece of advice out of the marriage books.

"All right," said John reluctantly, "but I'm beginning to feel like Macy's Advertising Department, instead of a doctor. Well, what do we do next?"

"In order for us to look busy," I decided, "the phone must ring much more often. Everyone to date has commented on its peculiar, unhappy silence. Now I wonder if Freda or my mother could help us out there."

They could and they would. For the third, fourth, and fifth guest nights, to the satisfaction of everyone present, our phone rang every hour on the hour (my mother) and every hour on the half (Freda), whereupon John and I went into our act.

"Dr. B.'s office," I would answer with special dignity, and then turn to John with a gesture implying annoyance at such constant interruption, and say, "For you."

In the expectant hush that immediately followed as he walked over, I would murmur wearily: "Patients just never let him rest. Terribly busy, terribly!"

Properly impressed, the visitors would listen eagerly to his every word like G-men taking down confessional testimony from a dying man, and John, aware of his audience, would make it good.

"Mrs. Parker?" he would glibly improvise while Freda giggled on her end. "That's too bad. A hundred three, you mean four? Try some of that medicine I left last time and I'll be there in the morning."

Or else he would say, "Mrs. Jones? Yes. What's that? Right side pain? Sounds like appendix. Vomiting too? You don't say. I'll be right over." And in this script he would get up, take his bag, leave the house, and ride five times around the block in his car.

Upon his victorious return, he would be greeted by a barrage of medical questions, and it was actually startling and fascinating, even to me, to hear his detailed accounts of the different, nonexistent case reports, almost as if he were daydreaming aloud. A perfect Freudian wish fulfillment indeed!

But though our action bore some fruit in that occasionally a well impressed visitor would turn up in the office as a patient, or sometimes refer a more distant relative, the strain of perpetuating the farce, combined with the degrading feeling of shoddiness, proved within two weeks to be too much.

One night, we were in the midst of our telephone routine, when the entire system collapsed. "Mrs. Parker?" John began as usual. "That's too bad. A hundred three, you mean four, you mean six?" and at this point he lost all self-control and burst into such hearty laughter that he couldn't speak. Equally aroused, I started to laugh too, while our enraged visitors, who naturally could find no amusement in so tragic a plight, expressed their violent disapproval by a hasty departure.

"So don't talk to us about building a practice by socializing," John said after he completed this gruesome account of our attempts. "We'll have to find an easier way, if there is any."

Bob smiled sympathetically. "I can imagine how you felt," he said. "I would too. As a matter of fact, that's why I intend to specialize. In that way, I'll get my work from doctors and never have to bow down before every Tom, Dick, and Harry patient who deigns to let me thump his precious chest. Besides, I'll be a bigshot too, and make real money. No scut work for me!"

John and I were both surprised at Bob's remarks, but while John was merely startled at this sudden announcement of his friend's intentions, I was downright shocked. Of course, the modern trend

toward specialization is old hat. From the obstetrician who ties the navel cord to the pathologist who performs the post mortem, it is decidedly a mark of arrested intellectual and social development, and generally poor form, to be treated by anyone but a recognized specialist. In fact, many people behave as if a death certificate, signed by one of these top-flight demigods, guarantees sure passage through the Pearly Gates.

But to hear Bob so boldly and blandly state the primary motive behind almost all specialization, astounded me. Originally, a specialist was a general practitioner who became a true expert in a chosen field. His role was that of consultant only, to be called in at the discretion of the attendant physician in cases where his extra skill was required because of a difficult, technical procedure involved, or a problem diagnosis.

But today, the specialist is any young fellow like Bob, who knows little about medicine in general, and just slightly more about his specialty in particular, but is guided in his work by a love of greater prestige, higher pay, and fewer working hours, while it is the public itself that is left holding the bag. Under an erroneous assumption of getting the "very best care," they cheat themselves of the psychological benefit of confidence and faith in a family physician, and settle for impersonal, ordinary, commercialized attention at five times the fee any competent, general practitioner would charge.

"Bob Abbott," I exclaimed, "you sound like a prospective stock broker, not a doctor. It's shocking!"

"Nonsense," said Bob earnestly. "I'm only being honest, instead of talking high human motives like the stuffed shirts at the hospital. And even if they don't admit it in plain English, it still adds up the same."

"But what fields are you choosing?" asked John.

"Surgery, of course," was the immediate reply. "I considered eye work because there's least to do there, and I want something that I won't have to be on call for emergencies. I even thought of X-ray because the hours there are fairly regular and the work simple too,

but it would make me feel like a photographer, not a doctor. Obstetrics is too annoying—babies can come at any time, and pediatrics is out because I can't stand the brats.

"I finally decided on surgery because that's where the fat fees are, and where the prestige is greatest. I'm taking a two-year residency in surgery starting next month when my internship is over. I was lucky to get one in this field, or I would have had to settle for one of the others. And when I'm through, I'll be doing an appendectomy for a couple of hundred dollars in the same time it takes you to examine a patient thoroughly for a couple of dollars."

"You win," said John with a big smile. He raised his glass of beer toward Bob and toasted: "Here's luck for the great surgeon and," he gestured to himself, "here's hope for the vanishing general practitioner."

But after Bob left, I was definitely disturbed. "Darling," I asked John, "I never really thought of it before, but is that what you'd rather do also? Grab a residency and specialize?"

John laughed, but spoke seriously. "I thought I had told you how I felt," he answered. "I like doing everything; being able to deliver a woman, or set an arm, or help her raise her baby. I'd never feel like a real doctor if I were one, say, like Harry Stivers who treats skin conditions only, and when he was faced with a sudden hemorrhage case the other day on the ward was as helpful about it as Charlie McCarthy."

"I'm glad," I said, feeling reassured. "I was worried."

He drew me close and continued: "Specialization is necessary and helpful in just about two cases out of each hundred. I know the specialist is the fashionable rage right now but a human being is not just an isolated stomach or a heart. The day is coming when at least twenty-five or more doctors will be needed to examine one man thoroughly, and when, if an accident occurs and fifteen physicians are on the spot, there won't be one able to help any more than an intelligent boy scout because the injury is not in their special fields. For me, it's general practice and my own regular surgery. I only hope

the popular trend won't force me into something fancy like psychiatry before I'm through, if only to keep up with the Dr. Joneses."

It wasn't until the next day, however, that I realized that all of Bob's fine talk hadn't solved our problem of patient collecting either, and I said as much to John.

"Don't be impatient, sweetie," was his reply. "We're coming along fine, if slow—"

"And interesting!" I added significantly.

It is not with mere idle patriotism that I am ready to swear that medical practice is the most fascinating pursuit of happiness. From the very first day, Life with Doctor was like no other life in the world. As practice progressed, moreover, it turned into a grand tour through a shocking, hilarious, new set of the facts of life, and I learned that there is no more liberal education anywhere comparable to that given for free in a medical office.

"It isn't possible!" I gasped one night, after the third unmarried pregnancy had shown up in a week. "Why, John, this last girl isn't even sure just which man it was!"

John laughed at my amazement. "Don't let it get you," he finally replied. "A good girl is still more than a figure of speech, even if things do look a bit rough around here. I saw the shocked look on your face yesterday when Mrs. Kay admitted to five secret abortions before marriage, and how indignant you were the day before because Mr. O'Dare confessed that he picked up that gonorrhea in a little extramarital cheating. But darling," he set me down on his lap to listen, "you must remember that you're acting like a nurse for a doctor, and as such must be professional."

"I thought I was professional," I answered.

"No, you're not," he insisted. "You have to get a good poker face, and remember at all times that a doctor is like a minister or any other religious man, or even a lawyer. He hears what really goes on behind the front blinds, and he must never betray the confidences. You know that."

"Statute No. 440," I said. "But your patients don't know it.

Didn't you ever listen to the nice, frank, personal, detailed conversations in the waiting room? And by strangers, too?" I pulled at his ear and whispered: "Did you know that Mrs. Welsh told everyone today that her husband has to go to the bathroom five times each night, and that it wakes her up? Did you know that Mrs. Strong's Patrick is very passionate?"

Our laughter seemed to clear the air completely, and in the days ahead I concentrated on being professional. This means that when Mrs. Dixon coyly conceded eight more years to her age than she had on a previous visit with her spouse, I scarcely blinked; that when Mr. Dixon turned up only two days later with a honey of a chorus girl whom he'd gotten in trouble "while the Mrs. was on vacation," I tried to act as if he had come for some indigestion; and that when little Gloria Sullivan from across the street, aged sixteen, was "caught," I managed to treat it like a bad fall on the ice.

"Illness does strange things to people," I summarized it to John. "All the protective barriers of civilization are stripped aside, as if it dumps people into hot water, from which they come up shaking with all the make-up off."

"It certainly does," agreed John. "Which reminds me—I've got a good one for you today! Remember Mrs. Brown?"

Did I! Mrs. Brown was Toity-Toid Street's favorite daydream of Park Avenoo, with an overdone Harvard accent and a million dollar vocabulary, all misplaced "due to the vicissitudes of life" (a direct quote) in bargain basement clothes.

"Well," John continued as I nodded eagerly, "you remember I delivered her last week?"

Again I nodded. It had been sheer joy for me to watch Mrs. Brown's ungraceful, undignified, pregnancy bulge, and revel in nature's perfect democracy.

"Well," he repeated again, "you know how she speaks. All during her labor, she yelled only in refined tones, and carried on with what she obviously considered was gentility. 'Oh, Doc-tah,' she'd say, 'I am in ex-cru-shi-a-ting agony!' I tell you, the nurses gasped!"

As he paused for breath, I asked, "Did she break at all?"

"Break?" he roared. "It was a cloudburst! What a revelation! We gave her a whiff of ether at the end, and she went under still talking nicely, but when she came out, it was Mr. Hyde himself. 'Who the hell do ya think y'are?' she yelled, and plenty more. She sounded like a First Avenue truck driver in a traffic jam. Miss Connelly, the O.B. nurse, nearly passed out with hysterics."

Sometimes I think we clung to most of the funny stories for balance itself, especially after all the grim, daily problems that beset us both.

John's share was mostly the practical management of practice, something as unconnected with medicine as the bookie racket, and yet as fundamental in dealing with patients as a stethoscope.

Poor John. Some patients wanted long examinations, some short, and all he wanted was to please.

"Making a diagnosis is a cinch," he used to say, "compared with the horrible business of satisfying a patient."

In despair, he approached a Dr. Hollis, an older colleague, and asked for advice. "Don't ever try to impress a patient, John," said Dr. Hollis. "I used to try: but when I took a needlessly long time over an examination, even looking at the toenails and the hair, half said: 'Dumb guy, that doctor, couldn't seem to find out what was the matter with me,' and the other half said: 'Good doctor! Gives a thorough examination,' not realizing that three-fourths of it was a waste of time.

"Then when I did my examinations more quickly but adequately, again some said: 'I don't like that doctor. He isn't careful. He just rushes you out,' while others said: 'Smart doctor, knew at a glance just what was wrong.' The moral obviously is: You can please some of the people all of the time, you can please all of the people some of the time, but you can't please all of the people all of the time. So," finished Dr. Hollis, "I now work to please myself, and satisfy my medical conscience only. And if Mrs. G. doesn't like my speed, or my necktie, so what?" and he shrugged.

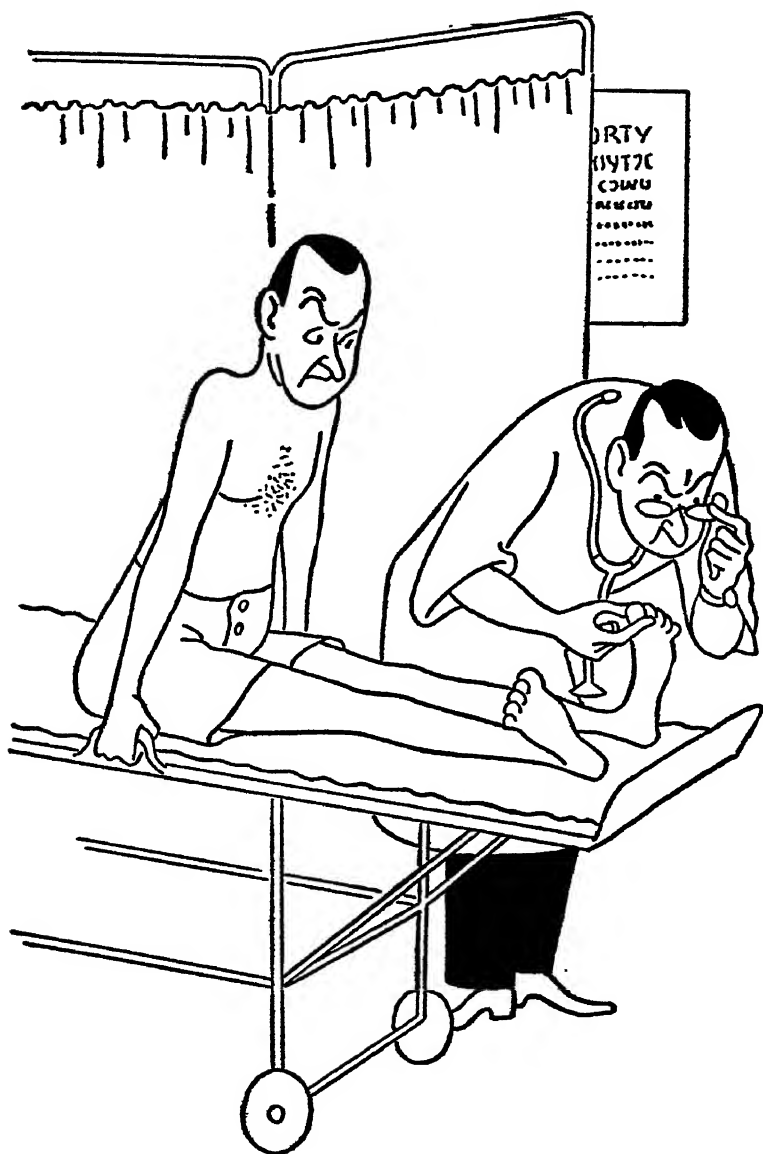
But even with this advice, which we wholeheartedly accepted, there was still the problem of how much to talk to patients. This was twofold: General talk during a treatment, and medical talk during a professional explanation.

The first was rapidly solved. After losing a Democrat patient because John didn't seem to appreciate Roosevelt enough, and then sacrificing a Republican because John seemed to appreciate Roosevelt too much, and then displeasing a Communist third by an unfavorable comment about the size of Stalin's mustache, we both bowed down before the sacred cows of civilization: politics, religion, and motherhood. Nowhere was democracy practiced as orthodoxly as in our office. Eventually, politics became taboo; a man could have been a Chinese Hindu practising Haitian Voodooism for all we cared; and all the beautiful and brilliant babies so proudly brought into the office became, tactfully: wonderful, wonderful, wonderful!

The problem of professional explanations settled itself in one pointed experience. One morning early in practice, John was summoned to see a sick patient, who, the envoy said, had a temperature of 101° and a bad cough of two days' duration.

Like the Angel Gabriel flying to the rescue, he seized his little black bag and ran. After a full hour's examination (he was in his "impress them with thoroughness" stage then) he announced portentously, "This child has an upper respiratory infection." Grippe, as he told me later, had seemed too simple a term to use after his Herculean efforts. Then he delivered a confusing lecture with technical details to the bewildered parents.

Were the Greenes impressed or pleased? Maybe the Mayo Clinic would have awarded him a Certificate of Merit, but all they did was to hold a family conference as soon as John left, and call in another physician. It seemed that the long examination had made them feel that John was unsure of his conclusion, and that the high-powered diagnosis was too strange and ominous sounding for casual acceptance.



"Now I am taught," John laughed afterward, and that's how he stayed.

My problems, however, were not quite so easily solved. The sudden exposure to an unadulterated world of disease brought me an unfamiliar feeling of insecurity and alarm. Until this time, with the brazen self-confidence of youth, things like death and serious illnesses had seemed as remote as Mars. Now, all at once, it was like discovering not one, but fifty swords of Damocles hanging over our heads, all of which were constantly falling on everyone about, and one of which, Heaven forbid! could land on ours at any moment.

"You'll get over it," John roared when I reluctantly confessed my failing. "Why, I remember Kramer at med school was always having Wassermanns done because he was sure he had contracted syphilis from infected patients, and Harry Hall, he was a riot! Forever turned up scared stiff that every little pimple was a malignant growth!"

"Of course," Bob added one night when he and Agnes were visiting. "I remember all those guys, though, to be honest, we all went through it too. But don't worry, Evelyn. You'll get over it. You'll see."

But I didn't get over it. I merely learned eventually to stop thinking about it, and to my mind, there's a basic difference.

Then there was the business of John's professional attitude. It is strange perhaps, as a physician's wife, to have to admit that my pet peeve is physicians in general. Early in our courtship and subsequent practice, I had discovered that, as a group, doctors are narrow, egotistical, professionally arrogant, and stubbornly prejudiced in their own favor. When they speak, it is obvious that from their point of view, the Great Jehovah speaks too. Their commands to their patients often have all the earmarks of a royal Roman edict; and their rage, when their competency is questioned by patients in cases where in all honesty they should question themselves, is vaguely reminiscent of a schizophrenic in his Napoleonic stage. Instead of realizing and accepting the limitations of modern medicine, they

conjure up a false picture of being all-knowing, all-seeing, all-wise.

Of course, I can well understand how they get that way too. The man who rules in life and death cases almost by the divine right of kings, as a doctor does, must often become imperceptibly overwhelmed with the importance of his subject matter. The tendency toward autocracy is inherent in all human nature. Gradually, he forgets that his is but another trade mastered like plumbers or electricians learn theirs; and eventually he attributes to himself the significance that belongs only to his work. And then he walks through modern civilization like an uncrowned dictator, feeding on the fear and ignorance of the public.

"When I think of the people who don't smoke, eat or sleep when they please, because some doctor's got hold of them," I once told John, "I could scream. When I think of how children were once forced to swallow spinach no matter what, because you medics said it was good. And now, you say it is bad and causes sand to form in the kidneys.

"When I think of the innumerable diet fads you doctors start without a shred of substantial, scientific, final proof, but just to sound important! The times the whole country almost ulcerated its insides with bran and other rough foods; the way they're taking vitamins now in wholesale doses for anything from athlete's feet to cancer! Why, John," I finished indignantly, "if any politician ever tried to run other people's lives the way any ordinary doctor does, we'd call it unconstitutional and hang him. But if the holier-than-holy medic says 'Stick your head in ice water three times a day,' because he has nothing else to suggest for dandruff, we rush to obey. It's incredible!"

John sat up straight. "Say, wait a minute," he said, jokingly. "I just want to make sure nobody's listening." Then he asked, seriously, "You don't mean me, do you?"

"Nope," I answered, hugging him to show it. "There are some nice ones occasionally, just to prove the rule. But if you ever forget

that you're just another one of those famous 'little people,' I'll . . ." and I waved my fist at him in a mock menacing gesture.

As practice progressed, however, and it did almost without our being aware of it, it was natural for John's self-confidence and assurance to grow also. At first, I discounted many of his statements as professional enthusiasm, but then I began to worry.

It began one day in the park. Whenever the weather permitted, we would bring sandwiches to a near-by park, and eat leisurely in the open, taking the afternoon lull between noon and evening activities to thrash out the day's happenings and talk over anything and everything that had ever occurred. It was always a satisfying and happy time! I would offer up interesting bits of law school history: the boy in the last seat of the lecture room who was always figuring out smart ways to legally evade the laws he had just finished learning: or the student in the second row who, after hearing the professor comment on the impossibility of a female being guilty of rape, or convicted therefore, offered up these immortal words: "Prof, you should have known the girls in the camp I stayed at last summer!"

Then John and I would compare notes on the day's events. "Wasn't Mrs. Davis a riot on the phone?" he would recall. "She spoke and spoke. Then when the operator interrupted her and asked for another nickel, she answered in a hurt tone of voice: 'Operator, please be a little more respectful! I'm talking to a doctor now.'"

I would remember one next. "What about Mr. Paley?" I would remind John, and again we were off on a gale of laughter.

Mr. Paley had come in one day in deep trouble.

"What's the matter?" asked John. Mr. Paley was known to be a very nervous, hysterical man.

"Well," the patient said, "last week the feller who works next to me came in and said he couldn't swallow. His doctor said nothing was wrong, called it *globus hystericus*, and said it was nerves; and I

remembered that I had a lump in my throat like that five years ago and the doc said the same thing. So all week long I kept talking to him to snap out of it and get a grip on his nerves, and sure enough today, he's over it and comes in cured."

"Fine," said John encouragingly. "And now what's the trouble with you?"

Shamefacedly, Mr. Paley tried to look away. "Well, Doc," he finally said, "now I can't swallow!"

Oh, we were gay and happy, and filled with an intoxicating sense of accomplishment! Medical practice had given us a better insight into human nature, and what's more, we even learned the inside stories of different trades. There was the automobile-dealer-patient who confessed that his first price was always high to allow for a bargainer; and there was the waiter-patient who worked at a famous Manhattan restaurant who admitted that when a customer sends food back because a fly is in it, he merely flips out the fly behind scenes, and serves the dish again. Everything was new, and exhilarating, and exciting!

On this particular day, as on the others, we laughed over the choice bits and talked for hours. Then it happened.

"Time to go," I called merrily, standing up. "I'll take the thermos bottles home and you carry the forks and napkins in the paper bag."

I lifted the jugs quickly, but John hesitated.

"How will it look for me to carry it?" he finally asked. "After all, I do have to think of my professional dignity, don't I?"

I gasped aloud. "John," I almost wailed, "you promised you'd never get that way, stuffy, and oh, you know!"

Suddenly, I remembered his reluctance in calling for a suit of clothes at the tailor's last week, and his refusal to stop for butter the week before. And now, this fuss over a little brown bag!

"John," I pleaded, "don't you remember all we said?"

For a moment he didn't reply. Then he laughed sheepishly. "I'm sorry, darling," he said. "That was moronic, but you needn't worry.

It must have been the unusually busy day I've had that's gone to my head. Won't you forgive me? I promise it won't ever happen again."

Of course, I forgave him, and while it never actually did happen again, I began to worry. Without saying so, I started watching him carefully, for signs of any further professional symptoms; and since everything comes to him who looks for it, I found others.

I found myself discovering what looked to me to be the typical doctor's callousness.

"Don't you feel badly that you can't cure Mrs. Schindel's arthritis?" I asked John one day; when the woman had come in and gone out again in equally great pain.

"But no one can do any more for her," he replied matter-of-factly. "There's no cure for that. You shouldn't feel upset about things like that."

Then there was poor Mr. Green, a pleasant, affable man in his early fifties, who, John had discovered, had an inoperable malignancy and would probably expire within the year.

"I can't stand it," I wept when John told me. "How can I watch him come in regularly and have to make small talk, when all the time I know he'll soon be dead! How can you do it?"

But John was stern. "This is a doctor's office," he reminded me. "That's no way to act. You must be professional."

"I guess you're right," I said without conviction. "If only you were a traveling salesman or a publisher!" I muttered, and continued to nurse my grievance in silence.

To John, as to all of his colleagues, it seemed that a man or a woman was just a case, interesting or not, but little more than that; and I know that if I live to be a hundred, I will never wholeheartedly condone the so-called professional approach.

"I saw a beautiful hysterectomy this morning," Bob would say casually, as if he were announcing a trip to an art exhibit.

John would look up, pleased. "Find anything worth while inside?" he would ask eagerly.

"Not a thing," Bob's answer would carry a note of disappoint-

ment, "just a little innocent tumor," as if surely the patient owed him an apology for not producing something more fatal and fascinating like a cancer, for instance.

I would listen with horror. Urines at the dinner table I had learned not to mind. Blood samples and vaginal smears all over my frigidaire I could also ignore. Gory medical details, with my steak, were becoming part of the dressing, but this business of impersonalizing patients, as if they were discussing murder mysteries or rare specimens in butterfly collections was beyond me.

Not that John didn't work conscientiously and even worry a little over sick patients, but once the man was well, he exulted and filed it away as another case. It was just that to me, they were always personal matters, and still are.

"But that's unprofessional," John said again and again, when I tried to explain.

"And you're hard," I would repeat angrily.

How far this rift might have gone, I do not know, but fortunately, Fate, the original *deus ex machina* of them all, stepped in to show me that his way was not so different from mine as I had thought.

One day John said: "That Gonzales child is sick."

The old, familiar hurt and fear reached out at me again. "Bad?" I asked, remembering the beautiful, little black-eyed girl.

He nodded. "Very," he answered. "Tubercular meningitis. Rare kind of case."

"Don't," I prayed silently, "don't start talking as if it were a horse instead of little Connie!"

But he didn't, and I noticed with surprise that he had eaten little of his dinner.

All that day he watched constantly over the child, coming from the hospital only for office hours and urgent calls. And the next, and the next, too.

The third night, he came in slowly and sank down on the living room couch.

"Any better?" I asked as usual.

He shook his head sadly. "It's no use," he said suddenly. "She's near to dying, and there's nothing anyone can do but wait and see what happens. Not a thing!"

It was as if his professional armor had cracked, and I could really see the emotional depths beneath. All at once, I understood that it wasn't that he didn't care, but that he didn't dare to show it. No doctor, exposed to so much suffering and tragedy as all doctors are, can afford to lose that impersonal detached attitude that alone gives him strength to continue.

"Oh, John," I said, putting my arms about him, "it's not your fault. You mustn't let it get you down like this. It's only a patient."

The words came naturally to my lips, and the sudden reversal seemed right. Marriage, I always think, is like a peculiar, powerful kind of osmosis, with its unpredictable shifting of strength from points of higher to lower concentration.

"Thanks," said John with perfect understanding, equally unsurprised by my turnabout.

Just then the telephone rang and he ran to answer. "Darling," he almost shouted, after a quick conversation, "that was Harris at the hospital. Connie's made it! A sudden change for the better. Hooray!"

It was a long, victorious kiss, and I hardly had breath to say: "Is this your professional behavior sir?"

The telephone rang again.

"Whew," said John running once more to catch the phone, "this is beginning to sound like a very busy office."

And as I listened to him cheerfully explain to a Mrs. Horace why she shouldn't eat sour pickles, I realized for the first time that this was true: We really seemed to have acquired a practice! Gradually, insidiously, almost as painlessly as growing a beard, and without any Machiavellian schemes, we had become professionally established.

"Success!" I gloated exultantly, mentally issuing an immediate statement for the press: "The evolution is finally complete. From

penury to hope, from victory to despair and back again, from misunderstanding to clarity, from log cabin to White House, from—”

“Hey, darling,” John called, hanging up the receiver, “what about dinner? And do you have an extra five dollars someplace? I’m a little short on the next installment on the fluoroscope.”

“In my purse,” I said disgustedly, as my helicopter crashed. And so stepping from the pages of Dun and Bradstreet’s and the Social Register, Gloria Vanderbilt Curie Rockefeller, alias Me, returned to the beef stew in the kitchen.

CHAPTER SEVEN



The White Man's Burden

*It's dust, dust, dust, dust, dusting over everything,
Wash, wash, wash, wash, washing almost everything,
Sweep, sweep, sweep, sweep, sweeping up and down again,
There's no discharge in a house!*

—with apologies to Kipling's "Boots"

Woman's work, in general, has always been recognized as one of the most endless, boring, and tedious types of human endeavor. But woman's work, today in particular, despite the many utopian gadgets on the market that are guaranteed to do everything but talk and think for the modern housekeeper, is the most difficult job of all. As if cleaning and cooking in its basic forms were not enough, a masochist type of feminine society has discovered a more sophisticated method of drudgery: The new path to heaven is paved with spic and span. The new road to Hell is waylaid by tattletale gray. And the new prerequisite for immortality is social etiquette.

The daily battles, waged in the glorified names of cleanliness and propriety, make World War II seem like a game of cops and robbers, and are havoc-raising indeed. As a result, one of the heaviest crosses borne by our Western civilization is the foolish complexities and laborious regulations that we have grimly attached to each

iota of ordinary living, so that to die, to marry, to be born, or just even to eat dinner would wear out ten copies of *Emily Post*, followed by the development of an anxiety neurosis. And the psychiatrists cheer!

"Dirt," said my mother distinctly, pronouncing it like scarlet-lettered sin, and speaking like a true disciple of modern house-keeping, to the novice, "is inexcusable."

We were sitting in her living room discussing my problems of keeping house. It was not until late fall, after enough patients had appeared to convince me that John and I were in no further danger of requiring home relief, that the idea had even entered my mind. Preoccupied with the more elemental aspects of getting started (a healthy perspective I should never have abandoned), domestic work had been unquestionably of a secondary nature: a whiff, a pat, a promise, a good, strong blow at the dust in passing, and a straightened bed. Now, as my mother spoke, I realized my time had come.

"All right," I said gaily, trying to offset the uncomfortable seriousness in her tone of voice, "you tell me the minimum to be done in a house, and I'll make that my maximum."

My mother sniffed. "A house is a hard taskmaster," she reaffirmed. "You have to dust daily, sweep up, wash the kitchen and bathroom floors, make the bed, besides doing many other chores like cleaning the blinds, laundering clothes, and so forth. You might as well face it now," she finished, speaking again with the proud sorrow of a martyr: "Woman's work is never done."

"Now, wait a minute," I said hurriedly, "I'm not out to set new records. I asked for the minimum only."

"There is no minimum," she replied, and this was her creed: "A house must be kept thoroughly clean. It's a woman's duty to her husband. It takes hard work, and energy, and time, but after all, you wanted to get married, didn't you?"

There being no sensible, soothing reply to this refrain, I soon left, and set about doing this new kind of "duty" to my unsuspecting, undemanding, uncaring "husband." Bearing my mother's teach-

ing in mind, I docilely set out on the oldest female course. Religiously I scoured and scrubbed, bowing down to our twentieth-century precept that cleanliness is no longer next to godliness, but has taken its place.

Of course, I tried to put method into my madness by availing myself of every loudly lauded household product on the market, only to find that except for slightly different commercials and wrappings, they were all the same. Alas, there was no adequate substitute for manual labor.

As I worked, however, many things became suddenly apparent. I began to notice, for instance, that the most informal snack at the end of the day, entailed dishes. I found myself almost uncontrollably resenting visitors as they perched innocently on my couch, because I would have to plump up those sofa pillows when they left. I even seriously considered disposing of our few, measly pieces of silver to the nearest junk dealer because of the polishing effort involved; and as for our slight collection of antique figures, I think even keeping the original Venus de Milo clean, if I won her in a raffle, would have seemed so burdensome a chore that I probably would have turned her down. It is not that woman's work is never done, I discovered, but that it is always being undone; and outside of actual starvation and developing a sinecurean, ascetic, hobo way of life, I could see no relief.

As if to plague me further in my labyrinthian dilemma of domesticity, I was alarmed to discover that we were sharing our castle (a poetic term for the housework around my neck), with a member of the rodent family.

One Saturday night, when we returned from an early movie while Freda watched the telephone, she greeted us cheerfully with the news that we had a mouse.

"A mouse!" I gasped, as if she had informed me that a homicidal maniac had invaded my home.

"Sure," she said, "I heard it in the kitchen."

"That's nothing," John added quickly, "we had lots of them at

my aunt's," as if he were boasting that they raised thoroughbreds.

"Well, we didn't keep them at *my* house," I replied indignantly. "Oh, John, what'll we do?"

"Do?" he seemed surprised. "Nothing. It's probably just a stray one, and will undoubtedly go back wherever it came from. Forget it."

But I couldn't just lightly dismiss a live mouse in my kitchen from my mind, any more than I could idly imagine Pochahontas doing the Charleston at the Stork Club. I worked with my usual resentment, but under a new and more difficult type of tension, expecting at any moment to have Mr. Mouse sneak up behind me like the villain in a murder mystery.

"He can't hurt you," John said logically, when I complained.

"But I'm afraid," I said. "It makes me nervous." Obviously, I would never make a suitable wife for Tarzan.

"Afraid of a tiny mouse? Ha, ha," laughed John, and I realized as I glared at him that there is basically very little difference between the grown men and the little boys who delight in putting worms down girls' necks, or running off with their hats.

The next Saturday night, we went out again, and this time Freda had more specific news about our nonpaying guest.

"I heard him gnawing at a paper bag in the kitchen," she said pleasantly. "That's where he is. You must have some exposed food there, haven't you?"

"My potatoes!" I said eagerly. "I bet he's there! Oh, John, I remember we once had a mouse—only once, and my father caught it and threw it down the toilet. You catch this one darling," I turned to him in sudden inspiration, "and I won't have to worry any more!"

"Catch it?" John nearly shrieked. "That's crazy. You can't go chasing mice, can you?" he asked, appealing to Freda, who, like most women, could never let a man down.

"That's right," she agreed, sounding like a sudden, self-constituted authority on small animal life.

"But I'm afraid," I protested. "It interferes with my cooking and housework. Please, darling, my father did it. Won't you even try?"

He began to waver. "But we don't really know where it is."

"In the bottom cupboard, where my potato bag is. Freda heard him, and that's the only exposed edible in the house. Please, dear?" I asked.

"Oh, all right," he said reluctantly, "I'll try."

Stealthily, the three of us tiptoed into the kitchen, hoping to take Mr. Mouse by surprise. Quietly, we snapped on the light, and sure enough, as we opened the cupboard door, a flash of gray went by.

"Catch him!" I yelled, like a Dodger fan to the third baseman at a World Series game.

"There he goes," Freda called excitedly, entering into the Army-Navy spirit of the thing.

Poor John! With the gallery cheering, he made a dramatic wild grab at the gray streak, only to lose his balance and fall on his face.

After we all finished laughing, even John, we organized a new plan.

"He must be inside this whole set of closet and wall cupboards," John said, "but how can we get at him?"

"Let's take every single thing out," I suggested. "Pots and pans and all, and there he'll be." I spoke from my safe position in the doorway of the kitchen, where I stood, afraid to go in, but anxious to witness the kill.

"That sounds good," said John. "I'll start right now."

So while I watched from my cowardly distance, he and Freda methodically took everything out, until there was only one drawer left to be done.

"It's full of tools and wires and string and all sorts of rubbish," I told them, "but I bet he's in there!"

"Oh, he probably went home already, away from here," Freda

said, as John went for the last drawer, but we both stood still and watched silently as he lifted it out and began to remove the things.

Suddenly, as John picked up the top screw driver, the mouse became visible to all of us. For a long moment he stared at us in horrible surprise, while we stared back with equal astonishment. Then, with a mad leap, he jumped to the floor and scampered back into the closet. But the unexpected, rapid flight shocked us all. Freda rushed to the doorway for protection; and John, equally startled, as if Frankenstein's monster had suddenly appeared, dropped the drawer he was holding, contents and all; while I disappeared into the bedroom, running like an Olympic racer at the firing of the starter's gun.

At this point, after we had all settled down again, John wanted to give up. "I told you it's a ridiculous thing to try," he said. "Me chasing mice! Besides it's after one already, and we should get some sleep. What do you say we retire and buy a nice, sensible mousetrap in the morning?"

"All right," I answered. "But first, let's just try to find the hole he came in by, and seal it off, so that he won't come back, if he's gone, and so that none of his friends can come in either."

They both agreed to this, but after a twenty minute search, we were convinced that as far as we could discover from all apparent means, Mr. Mouse had come into our lives through spontaneous generation.

"That means that he didn't leave," I said finally. "He's still here. Oh John, now I'll be afraid all over again!"

Then John got his idea. "Maybe we can chloroform him," he said thoughtfully. "I'll get my can of ether, and pour it all around the insides of the cupboard and close the doors. That should anesthetize him, and when he's knocked out, I pick him up, throw him down, and fini!"

"Brilliant," I breathed, and even Freda, who in the first place didn't understand why a little mouse should be bothering me but

was too polite to say so, seemed properly impressed at the marvels of modern medicine.

Accordingly, John got the ether, and started to pour. "Keep your faces away," he warned importantly, working like Sherlock Holmes in a mobile crime laboratory to corner a vicious criminal, "or this stuff'll get you too."

Finally, the can was empty and we stood by to await Mr. Mouse's collapse, the way Eisenhower must have watched Berlin. But nothing happened, except that we must have doused ourselves too, for all at once the effort of staying awake became harder than getting pennies back out of a slot machine. Just as all our eyes were half closing, Mr. Mouse ran energetically out from the cupboard and hid warily under the stove.

"Now I've really had enough," said John, and after Freda walked groggily to the door, we both stumbled into bed.

The next morning, I slept late, and didn't get up until after John had already left on a call.

"The mouse," I remembered drowsily, as he bent down to kiss me good by.

"You're dreaming," he answered and went out.

But when I got up, I found the mouse was very real, indeed.

"Maybe it's really gone away this time," I tried to tell myself, reaching sleepily for my toothbrush, and stopping short. There in the bathtub, and heaven only knows how he got there, was Mr. Mouse. He was obviously cornered, because try as he might, it was impossible for him to climb up the steep sides, and his exhaustion from his futile attempts to do so, was equally plain.

At first, I was frightened and inclined to run. Then I reconsidered, and emerged with the victorious thought: "Now John can get him as soon as he gets home!" which was rapidly followed by the even more triumphant idea: "I'll get him myself. It's easy now since he's so tired, and then I'll tell John. Yes, sir," I gloated, thrilled by the prospect of much deserved praise to come for this heroism.

above and beyond the line of duty. What was scrubbing a floor as compared with catching a mouse? I might even omit the bathtub sequence too. I decided, to make it sound better, but how should I do it?

By his tail seemed the most practical method, and, with Mr. Mouse evidently in the same state of collapse as a floorwalker after a penny sale in a bargain basement, also the most feasible.

With my bare hands? Even Denny Dimwit could have answered that. Hurriedly, still in my nightgown, I went into John's office and put on a pair of his rubber gloves. Protected by these, and trying to behave with the nonchalant aplomb of a professional sword swallower, I reapproached Mr. Mouse, and to our mutual surprise, easily caught him.

"Now what do I do?" I tried frantically to remember, as I dangled the poor, struggling animal by his tail. As I stood thus trying to recall, I looked straight into its face, and was overcome with a deep sense of pity for the helpless creature. This striking resemblance to human beings that is so often found in many animal faces, has often disconcerted me.

"Down the toilet," I suddenly knew the answer but hated to do it.

"But you can't go on holding him all day!" I told myself furiously. "What'll you do?"

Just then I heard John's key in the lock, and rushing to the door as he opened it, I threw Mr. Mouse into the street, where he scampered happily away.

"Of all things!" John ejaculated, as he watched my performance in open-mouthed amazement. "What's going on here anyway?" He stared through me as if I were the reappearance of Topper.

With carefully chosen words, I rapidly explained; and then finished casually, trying to dismiss the entire story as a perfectly ordinary affair: "At least now I can work in peace. The mouse is definitely gone."

"It's all right," John answered, still laughing, "we worked with



mice in the labs, and got awfully fond of them too. All right," he tried not to smile in answer to the look on my face: "let's leave it that now you can work in peace"; and that's how it remained.

But, mouse or no mouse, there was no peace in my work. The more I fussed, the more I fumed and raged inwardly at my domestic shackles, until my incomplete conversion to the precepts of spotlessness became apparent even to my feeble mind.

"At least the place looks good, doesn't it?" I asked my mother one day, in an effort to bolster my wavering morale.

"Oh, that," she said. "Yes." Her praise was hampered by the fact that she always began each visit with a basic feeling of surprise that, left to my own devices as I was, without her guidance, I had not degenerated into looking like something out of Dracula, that John had not begun to show his skeletal structure, and that our apartment did not more resemble an outhouse. "But you poor, poor child," she finished almost in tears, as she watched me work.

"Why poor?" I inquired, feeling momentarily, from her tragic words, like a homeless waif.

"To think that with all your advantages," she explained, beginning to really cry, "that you should have to be doing things like this—for that man!"

Whenever emotion overcame her, John became "that man," and the implications were deadly.

"Oh now, mother," I protested, leaning my carpet sweeper up against the wall, "I live here too, you know. And what's so awful about doing things like this?"

After a thorough blow in her spotless handkerchief, a luxury I had long relinquished to disposable tissues, my mother continued: "Cleaning floors, washing clothes—to think that I should have lived to see you doing that!"

At first, I dismissed her words with the false conviction that it was only her maternal mind speaking. I labeled it the Eternal Mother's cry that her child is better than all others, and as such, deserving of the best; and I marveled at the egoism and blindness of a

people who dare to rear their children as if they were supercolossal angels, and then weep to discover the feet of clay.

But gradually I came to recognize this contempt for household drudgery as the great female paradox. Irreconcilable as it may be, the fact remains that while as a nation, women have been taught to revere cleanliness, they have also been taught to despise the process of getting there. Compared to the American caste system of housework and houseworkers, the untouchables of India are more like the chosen people in the Blue Book.

In self defense, even I had to submit before this final law. At a party given by one of John's colleagues about a week after my mother's remarks, I startled a group of elegant, middle-class doctor's wives by innocently confessing that my weariness was due to waxed floors that day.

Oh, cardinal heresy of the uncivilized! Oh, original social sin of them all! Had I been worn speechless by a prolonged shopping tour for just that right shade of doily to go with the off-red in my new slipcover, all would have been forgiven. Had I come in a state of complete collapse endured in the service of afternoon bridge and night life, I would have been received as an honored, battle-worn soldier in a common cause. But to wax floors was incomprehensible, and the silence that followed my statement was eloquent.

"You mean," gasped Mrs. Hale, as if I had admitted to being a psychopathic arsonist, or a lesbian, "that you did it yourself?"

Before I could reply, little Mrs. Burnham spoke up next. "But your maid, where was she?"

For a moment, I was tempted to spread the gospel as I saw it; but only for a moment. Then I sighed eloquently, in a beautiful imitation of the prepossessing matron talking about her servant troubles, and gave birth to a wonderful idea. "My maid?" I repeated, winking at John across the room. "You mean Clementine? Isn't it awful, but I had to give her the day off. Her father's uncle's brother-in-law died, and she said she had to go."

Everyone smiled in relief at this familiar complaint, and Mrs.

Hale contentedly took the ball and carried it for almost another hour with significant, similar tales about her Dolores.

But Clementine, thus born, flourished forever after as a protective wedge between convention and me. My mythical maid, John and I privately called her, reveling in her public existence. Under my careful tutelage, she grew hair, eyes, a special nose size, habits, and a few eccentricities. "Oh, she just this minute went out," I would say with a "You-know-how-they-are" gesture to many a curious visitor; or "Isn't she really a wonderful worker?" I would admit when the order of my house was praised: "A perfect jewel!"

"Poor Clementine," I said to John one night, after attributing some unusual indiscretion to her in public again. "I'm really getting very fond of her, aren't you? Not that I would hesitate to kill her off to make way for a nice, live helper some day. I'd like someone to do my work for me some day, too, but only when we can properly afford it. What I do mind is these nice, idle, bored women who act as if sweeping a floor were beneath them, and tantamount to cleaning out a cesspool, whereas in reality a little solid housework would just neatly fill the emptiness in their lives. It gripes me to see them hiring maids even when they can't really afford them, put the poor girls to sleep on cots in poorly ventilated closets or bathtubs, for want of suitable house room, and then behave like Marie Antoinette herself when faced with the prospect of a maidless day."

John understood. "But darling," he asked after a slight pause, "do you mind doing it all? Are you sure?"

"I don't mind doing what has to be done," I stated definitely, "but I've been doing too much. Something's wrong somewhere."

This conviction grew upon me steadily. For my money, she is most blessed among women who tends her house willingly, without conflict or discontent, without ever being torn between a perfect day and a bottle of furniture polish. But for me, such compatibility did not exist. The clash between my personal happiness and my personal duty to an exaggerated sanitary code was a perennial problem, and one in growing need of solution.

"Housekeeping is awful," I told John one night, after having to forcibly repress a shudder at what his comfortable relaxation was doing to the couch.

"Why is it awful?" he asked, pulling me down beside him.

For the first time, I made an audible analysis of the entire situation for our mutual consideration.

"The trouble is," said John, when I finished, "that all you young girls nowadays aren't trained for housework, so that you work under two handicaps: one, it's an unfamiliar territory, and two, you don't know how."

"That's true enough," I agreed. "But come to think of it, why should we be trained for it any more than you or any other man? Especially when we girls have jobs too, and professions?"

John laughed as if I had suggested something ridiculous like hair ribbons for men and whiskers for girls. "Everybody knows that running a house is a woman's sphere," he said loftily, and there was no disputing that.

In the beginning, God created man, and from there on in woman has always been an afterthought, as witness the domestic situation. Unfair though it may be, tradition has made of man the honored guest in his home, and emphatically put woman in the kitchen. With all her fine independence and new freedom into the economic and social worlds, with all her big talk about modernity and equality, modern woman's greatest dilemma is her inability to change the fact that marriage still is essentially an old-fashioned business, and always has been. Whereas if grandma merely raised her brood and kept her house, she was doing well, we of today have unwittingly assumed tremendous burdens. Had we relinquished these time-honored jobs along with the voluntary acquisition of our newer ones, all might have flourished. But no! Even without a profession of her own, the ordinary, modern wife is expected not only to be Aunt Jemima in the kitchen and Cleopatra in the bed, but also she must look like Hedy Lamarr in the parlor (or as close to it as she can get), speak like Dorothy Thompson at a cocktail party, and act like

Mrs. Vandermeer the sixth when entertaining at home. And they call us the Lost Sex!

The very next day, however, I sounded the first call in my coming revolution.

"Look John," I said when I came home from school at noon, "how about helping me keep this place clean too? I help you in the office, don't I?"

He looked startled. Most men have what they like to think is an inherent virile aversion to housework. But John had the double handicap of having been brought up by a maiden aunt whose reverence for inviolate manhood was almost sacrilegious; and who, incidentally, died without ever wholeheartedly forgiving me for the time she caught John humbling himself with the dinner dishes. But at least he was willing to try.

"Of course, darling," he said. "I know you have a lot to do, but it never occurred to me to help. What should I do?"

I gravely outlined my plan: John was to make the bed and do the breakfast dishes in the morning, and I, upon my return from school, would take it up from there.

The idea itself was sound. Certainly democracy should begin at home, and in cases like ours where both the man and the woman are engaged in extracurricular activities, it seems only fitting that they each share some of the burdens of a mutual establishment. The attributes of masculinity are in no way impaired by a dustcloth or a broom; and I have always wondered at the strange, arbitrary rule that allows a man to toss a salad, carve a turkey, or mix a cocktail with conventional impeccability, yet balks at any further participation.

But if the idea was sound in theory, in practical demonstration it completely overlooked the fact that a man's best defense against housework is his inept application. John was as competent in this field as Albert Einstein is in bricklaying. His efforts at bedmaking made the bed look like a hurried travelogue from Mount Olympus to Pleasant Valley and back again, and it took all my self control

not to redo the sheets and spread. Unquestionably he had the domestic aptitude of a turtle! "Never mind, I'll finish it properly," had been my mother's way of limiting aid at home, but I was determined not to follow suit.

Realizing that John's assistance was mostly moral support at best, I began to look for other, more elementary work-savers next. Little by little, it was borne in upon my struggling conscience that floors were made to be walked upon and not eaten from, that tables were made to be looked at, and not into, like mirrors. I waged wholesale war against all dust collectors not safely under glass, and eyed our new furniture with a utilitarian eye, for by this time we were adding extra pieces to our basic supply. There was a new chair in the living room, some flower prints in the bedroom, and a big, bronze umbrella stand in the hall. With the fortitude and forgiveness of Edith Cavell facing the firing squad, I magnanimously overlooked the first one hundred stains and nicks and bruises, until I could watch a guest drop ashes on the carpet without flinching, and could observe a wet glass on the end table without making a rude dash to save it.

But the final chain in my inhuman domestic bondage was not broken until one day, a few months after we moved in. Sustained by the erroneous belief that I was fulfilling one of the prime commandments of marriage, my housework, though streamlined, was still tedious. When the examination in Pleading and Practice was announced at school, I was of necessity forced to abandon everything else and concentrate only on the memorization of all the foolish, cumbersome, arbitrary rules that govern all legal conduct in court. After the completion of the test, however, I came home to a house that looked like a Hiroshima survival.

"Darling," I turned apologetically to John, expecting to share my dismay, "I'm so sorry I couldn't clean this up. This looks terrible, doesn't it?"

The puzzlement in his eyes was a revelation. "Terrible?" he asked, looking about the room as if he were incapable of visualizing the overflowing ashtrays, the flattened chairs, the littered floor, and the

dustiness that was like a London fog in the very air. "You mean the newspaper I dropped? I'm sorry." Carelessly, he picked it up, and went on: "Come on, sweetie, sit on my lap and tell me all about the exam. Was it hard? Do you think you passed?"

The moral was as plain as the smell of fresh coffee and fried bacon for breakfast: man is as much aware of and interested in the sanitary integrity of his home as he is in the mating habits of the scarlet-eyed *Drosophila*, or the sensitivity of grasshoppers to sucrose. And in point, let me add that some of the cleanest homes I have been in were by no means the happiest.

Feeling suddenly as free as Robinson Crusoe on his island, I effected my complete emancipation. Never again would I refuse to go to the park or to any other type of entertainment because of an unscrubbed floor, never again would I hesitate between the pleasure we owed each other, and the false duty to inanimate things.

"After all," I told John, "life nowadays is hard enough without complicating it by making a sacred trust out of housework. The Eskimo bride—I read it in the Sunday paper—starts housekeeping with only four items in her igloo: a meat knife, a blubber burning lamp, a cook pot, and a sewing kit. And I consider that remarkable choice highly significant."

With irreverent disregard, I decided that keeping house should be more like any other type of human activity, instead of the unconstitutional form of enslavement it had become. The long vaunted, long lamented, unpunctuated labor that housework had always meant was a ridiculous method of martyrdom. Some place between immaculate protection and disorderly neglect, lay that happy medium, and I determined to find it.

The basic principle I followed was a system of *laissez-faire* ease, which allowed me the privilege of either cleaning like mad when the spirit so moved me, or else letting everything go to rack and ruin upon the infrequent occasions when the need for luxurious rest overwhelmed me. In between times I held to a routine that was fixed, but flexible, and minimal; and blamed my periodic fits of

fanaticism upon heredity. I forswore the barbaric custom of spring cleaning upheavals, preferring to accomplish the same results gradually over a period of time; and I came to regard it as divine intervention and heavenly revelation that it rained each time the windows were washed.

But my mother was horrified. "You didn't dust today," she would say accusingly, running a faint line across the dresser top.

"Nope," I would cheerfully reply, "I went on a call with John instead. And anyhow," the impulse to tease was too strong to be denied, "it's much more fun to do it when the dirt really collects, and you can get a good before and after view."

Even Freda began to look upon my activities as those of a well-balanced manic-depressive. "Your windows need doing," she volunteered one day.

"Not yet," was my happy response. "We can still see through."

The maternal attacks, however, continued.

"But what will people think?" was her constant cry.

"Oh," she shrieked one day during a visit, "you've even got moths!"

After fighting it out for months with the moths, as if it were a hand to hand bayonet struggle for national survival, I gave up. "And the results are just about the same," I told my astounded mother, "as when I tracked each single one down like an enraged bloodhound. As for what people think," I finished, "my house is clean nine days out of ten, as you certainly know; and what's more, I have a wonderful time on all ten."

But she was unappeased. "You don't even fuss with cooking," was her next allegation, and again I pleaded guilty.

It is my considered opinion that even the gourmet who loves to discuss the intricate details involved in the art of eating, might think twice before he speaks if he had to cook it himself, and clean it up afterward too. When John and I were first married, the discouragingly dirty pot at the end of a meal fazed me much more than

the actual preparation beforehand. Although I had never cooked before, I knew enough to realize that literate people, armed with a can opener, need never starve. Buoyed up by this knowledge, and a glamorous picture of myself à la *Ladies Home Journal* ("Little Bride Prepares Supper for Two"), I set out to stake another claim in John's heart via the celebrated stomach.

Of course the usual things occurred, and more: the toast burned, the baked potatoes never got soft in the middle, and the whole pan of spaghetti fell into the kitchen sink when I was draining it. Did John kiss me when I cried, as do all the heroes in fiction? Did I cry?

I giggled merrily at each new thing that happened, and John, when he finished laughing too, merely asked: "Open another can, dear, or shall I?"

Whether I tried the more elaborate fixings or dished up the simplest hash, it all seemed to taste the same, for as John said: "It's too bad you can't serve French names on a plate."

As for the effect, that was disappointing also. The few times, for instance, when I would work especially hard over one of those "little simple dinners," which practically make themselves in the ladies' magazines but take hours to prepare at home, and the same twenty minutes to eat, I would ask John eagerly: "How was it dear?"

Expectantly, I would await his lavish praise, his tender appreciation of my homemaking talents.

"What?" he would ask, obviously stumped. "Oh, the dinner! Not too bad, not bad at all!"

Eventually, one point emerged clearly above all other culinary ones: there was no apparent connection between John's heart and his gastrointestinal system. In fact, I think that most of such male connections are usually highly exaggerated. The ordinary man does not really expect his home meals to taste like his glamorized remembrance of his mother's cooking, or to be served like a Waldorf-

Astoria banquet. He doesn't marry either, to please his palate, for if he did, it would be very inconvenient, to say the least, to spend his wedding night in the kitchen.

As a result, I settled down into a comfortable routine of plain, solid meals for everyday fare, with spasmodic flourishings reserved for special occasions only, so that these stood out in our lives like a "Sunday go-to-meetin'" dress to a pioneer, or an ice cream cone to a child. This method, incidentally, insures a greater command of respect for a woman when she does put her best foot forward, and never leaves her with that: "I worked my fingers to the bone and he doesn't even care" feeling.

To top it all off, like an extra spoon of whipped cream and a maraschino cherry on an ice cream sundae, I came up with a cataclysmic decision to eat out two days a week, preferably Saturday and Sunday, but not necessarily these.

"Five cooking days a week are enough for any woman. Why should she be forced to work harder than a coast-to-coast truck driver?" I told John in making the suggestion. "The single standard is a myth as long as a man inherits his privilege of sitting to eat, while a woman accepts as her lot the preparation, serving, and unhappy nibbling in between."

"Sounds like a welcome change to me," said John. "But won't it be too expensive?"

"Not necessarily," I replied. "That depends on where we eat and what you order. If it's a good week, we go to a restaurant. If it's a bad week, the Automat will do. And if it's a wonderful week, we can even make it a dinner dance with steak! Won't it be fun?"

And it was fun, almost like having dates again, in a way.

But the whole procedure was plain heresy to my mother. "No cooking, no regular cleaning system, no sense of responsibility," she listed, like an executor writing down the personal effects of the deceased.

"But we're happy," I said, turning to John for corroboration.

"Sure we are," said the never-failing light of my life. "I like the

way we live. The house is clean, but reasonably so, and neither of us has to feel inhibited about living in it. As for cooking, why I'm getting a pot belly, I'll bet. With our system, it can feel like Christmas and Thanksgiving whenever we so decide, for no calender reason at all. And that's fine."

The final test of all my housekeeping principles, however, came within the very next week.

For seven more satisfactory days, I rode the full crest of domestic adjustment and emancipation; until society, this time assisted by my mother, came forward to take me down a necessary peg or two. From Hitler and Mussolini to the stock-market crash of '29, I have learned that nothing lasts. Everytime I reach a point in life where I think "Eureka, this is it!" I find that I have unknowingly settled down on a pin cushion which sets me forth again. Is your bank account budgeted? The baby gets sick. Do you like your apartment? The rent is raised. There is no escaping.

It was exactly one week later that my mother returned and carefully planted the time bomb that was set for the following Saturday night.

"I met your Aunt Margaret today," she began significantly.

"How is she feeling?" I asked, ignoring the cue.

"Terrible," she answered firmly, gaining momentum and conviction with every word, "especially about not being asked here. Look dear, the whole family's offended. I came to insist that you invite them all to your house before the alienation is complete, even though I hate to interfere."

The familiar conclusion helped me recover. "The whole mob?" I managed to ask.

"The whole mob," she repeated. "Having guests is a very important part of keeping house, or didn't you know?"

"I know," I thought as I groaned aloud. Formal hostessing was one part of housekeeping that I had deliberately not considered at all as yet. It seemed, among other things, to be too great a problem to find the happy medium between the hostess who starts by begging,

"Won't you have another fig, won't you?" with the urgency of a politician soliciting votes, and ends by saying when you refuse, "Don't be bashful," while she thrusts it down your choking throat; and the hostess who dotes on informality to such an extent that she wanders indistinguishably among her guests, neither fish nor fowl, neither receiving nor extending hospitality.

Of course we had had visitors before. Bob and Agnes (how anxiously I watched their progress!) were regular commuters, and Gert Shaw had frequently stopped in to blaspheme our apartment in the spirit of friendship, besides many other members of the hospital crowd who visited too. But the mood had always been relaxed and friendly and gay, with very little of the heavy obligations of hostessing to interfere with my own enjoyment of their company.

It was not therefore the mere thought of extending entertainment that disturbed me now, but the required form.

From the determined look on my mother's face, and from years of experience, I recognized her plans for the forthcoming party as belonging to another school of thought. How well I remembered her hectic, harrowing engagements during my childhood, preceded by orgies of preparation, and proceeded by a nervous collapse. The best silver she grimly polished, the special "good dishes" that were dragged from hiding and washed in anticipation of company use, the floors that she waxed, the elegant hors d'oeuvres that took hours to fix and disappeared in a moment, the last-minute flurry because the flowers were late, and the final agony when the cake fell.

How well I remember the forced smile on her face as she moved among her guests wearing invisible placards that read: "We aim to please; the customer is always right," more like a night watchman on a job than a lady at a party, more like a head waiter at a society wedding. And then, the complete exhaustion that knocked her out like an anesthetic when the door closed behind the final departant: The "Thank God it's over!" she breathed as she went under, and the "Never again!" that my father swore under his breath.

All this was nostalgically fine, perhaps, but now I would be on the

other side of the fence: Not sneaking tidbits from the tray, but making them; not watching from the top of the stairs, but right in the thick of it all. With a final sigh for the indiscriminate continuance of this tribal tradition of holding open house for the formal inspection of the newly wedded couple by the relatives, I decided on a compromise solution.

"I'll have them over," I told my mother, "but I'll do it my own way, not yours. All right?"

It wasn't her idea of all right, but having no alternative, she reluctantly agreed. The moment she left, I rushed to the telephone and sealed my doom by extending wholesale invitations before my better judgment could reconsider, although I realized, as I did so, that the early bird who gets the worm is often only the fool who didn't wait.

When John came home, I promptly relayed what had happened, like a prisoner confessing before the bar.

"When?" he asked.

"Saturday night," I answered tensely, as if I were announcing the date of an execution.

"Must we?" he asked, as I followed him into the bathroom to wash his hands.

"We must," I replied, as he turned the water on, "and I asked every single one," I added, it having taken no great exercise of my intelligence to decide that wherever possible, one social stone should serve many birds.

Throughout all the preparations, I fumed like a rabid dog. Even with all my shortcuts, there was much to be done, and I constantly muttered: "More work! Makes no sense!"

With John's doubtful help, I cleaned the apartment from end to end, stopping on this side of fanaticism only when John's sensible male viewpoint wore me down.

"Look, sweetie," he protested, when I started scouting behind the furniture again, "You're not polishing jewels for Tiffany's. Enough's enough."

"But darling," I wailed, "you know how Cousin Blanche searches for dirt!" Some doctor (and who else would be at the root of such evil?) told Cousin Blanche that she was allergic to dust (besides ninety-eight other things), in consequence of which she had embarked upon an epic-making hunt for the offender, sneezing her way loudly from place to place to prove the point.

"I don't like people who come to my house to sniff in corners," said John. "Besides, after the first person or two gets here, the joint'll look like bedlam, anyhow, so why fuss?"

Since it did no good to logically assert that with this type of reasoning we would all stop eating, sleeping, and bathing, I conceded the argument, and devoted my energies to rapidly finishing the basic chores.

"Need any help?" my mother asked anxiously on the phone. "Want to borrow something?"

"Something" meant an elegant lace cloth, or her company silver.

"No, thanks," I said defiantly, and went back to my job.

"Are you using your best linens and silver?" Freda asked interestedly, when she heard what was up.

"No, sir," I laughed at that old bugaboo. "I don't have any in the first place; and if I did, I wouldn't save them for company."

All things considered, it seems to me that most of us have lost sight of the true, original purpose of hospitality. Nowadays, a formal party to a housewife is what a gallery exhibition has always been to an artist. No longer are we content with merely sharing our homes in a spirit of friendly fellowship; instead we compete with each other as if to provide an evening's entertainment were an exercise in complicated physical and mental gymnastics for the All-american Championship Trophy.

Accordingly, we have allowed the mentors of Emily Post to flourish through the years despite their tyrannical, dictatorial policies, which, while they may make nice tempests in the teapots of the idle rich, cause havoc and unjust enslavement among the more impecunious. From guest towels to hidden best china, we would like

to make our visitors believe that we dine on caviar every day, wash in ivory finger bowls, wipe on the finest snips of embroidered linen that aren't big enough to dry a whole toenail, and sleep in silk. As if from personal experience, they didn't know better anyway.

"Maybe if I had a staff of servants to keep occupied," I told John after Freda left, "I might go in for more of the social ritual. As it is, convenience comes first."

With this in mind, I planned a simple buffet menu so that everything could be ready beforehand with a minimum of current fuss. Nuts, fruit and candy were placed on dishes in strategic parts of the living room, while platters heaped with whole-sized cold meat sandwiches and pickles and olives, were left in the kitchen for those who wanted to eat.

"Good," said John, as he watched, "I hate hors d'ouvres. An awful mouthful of nothing," and he bit off a piece of pickle.

"You go dress," I ordered him out. "I'm working on a schedule here and at this rate we'll be late."

Just as I finished the last task in preparation for the night, Freda came back in.

"Here are some candles for your table," she said, putting them down. "They help."

They did, almost like camouflage, when lit.

"Thanks loads," I said, turning for the first time to look about.

The lamps in the house were all lit, the radio was tuned in low on some soft, sweet music. There were big, white chrysanthemums on the black piano, contributed by the courtesy of my mother, which were doubly dear and beautiful to me because, by economic necessity, I am one of that vast horde of funeral, farewell, and anniversary type of floral purchaser. The blinds were drawn against the coming night, and a wonderful peacefulness filled the orderly house.

"Nice," said Freda, as she looked and I was suddenly surprised to find that I thought so too. My ominous attitude of arduous worry gave way to a strange, new feeling of excited expectation, like before the curtain goes up on a Broadway first night.

"Very nice," said John, joining the spectators. Then he added: "Say, darling, do you know where my new tie is?"

Without stopping, as I usually did, to marvel at the mysterious ways in which God performs His marital wonders, so that I, who a few months ago could never find my own shoes without my mother's assistance, now acted as a magnet eye for John, I replied automatically, "Under the top shirt in the last dresser drawer." Then I remembered, "Gosh, I've got to dress too!" and all at once, despite all my careful plans, we were in the middle of the usual last-minute flurry.

"Where's the shaker?" yelled John, as the door slammed shut behind Freda. In the best of household tradition, he was in charge of the drinks.

"On the top shelf," I called, hurriedly zipping up my dress. Finally, I came out and asked, "How do I look?"

He stopped still. "Your slip shows," he answered, and continued shaking.

I took a quick look at the clock. "Lord," I groaned, "they'll be here in a moment. Darn this slip!" I growled, voicing an eternal female vexation, "you'd think the dress manufacturers and the petticoat makers would at least collaborate on the length of hems."

"Say," said John, "there's not enough ice. What'll I do?"

"Ice?" I knew I had forgotten something. "Borrow some from Freda," I advised, "and come right back."

Just as he returned, and while I was still struggling with my slip, the doorbell rang.

"Oh!" It was a simultaneous wail of despair.

Desperately, I tucked the slip into the top part of my girdle (which meant I would have to watch it all night), and met John in a headlong collision as we both ran for the door.

From then on, the guests continued to arrive until soon the bedlam John had prophesized was in full bloom. Aunt Hilda appeared with a bowl of live goldfish, which I would have preferred fried. Cousin Blanche stayed for four hours and only sneezed twice, which

glowing tribute to my housekeeping was regarded by the whole family as a Congressional Citation for cleanliness. Uncle Peter and Aunt Jean fondly escorted their Donald, who brought forth the usual remarks about the marital double bed to the hysterical satisfaction of both his parents. "Isn't he wonderful?" they asked everyone else whenever Donald paused for breath, implying by their tone of voice that it was a darn shame that Bob Hope got there first.

There was also Cousin Harvey who came with a copy of his latest chapter from the Great American Novel that he had been writing for the last three years, at the expense of two unmarried sisters and a widowed mother. "It won't make the best seller lists with their potboiler junk," he assured us as he settled down to read a part aloud, "but it will some day make great literary history."

Even the telephone, in an unusual spirit of benevolent despotism, yielded two genuine calls for John, which impressed everyone no end that my "young man was up and coming," the final measure of success.

Back and forth, we ran, carrying drinks and food, emptying our meager supply of ashtrays, and stopping to laugh at passing remarks.

"Play the piano for us," someone called, and I obliged, while John sneaked out to the corner store to replenish our dwindling provisions.

"Now, let's sing," someone else suggested, and we did, beginning with "Dear Old Girl" for Cousin Blanche, and "Down by the Old Millstream" for Uncle Peter, to "Saint Louis Blues" for Cousin Donald, and "Melancholy Baby" for me.

"Tired?" said John when he came upon me in the empty bedroom, where I had retreated to catch my breath. "Nice party, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes," I said happily, to both questions, leaning up against him as I rested. It was definitely a wonderful party, even with Uncle Bert, who was getting a little high, and Aunt Margaret, who *would* find a fly in her drink, and the three dishes and one glass that got broken.

"But still a lot of work," he answered, using my exact, former rebellious words.

"That's funny," I said, "I seem to have forgotten that."

As I paused to think about it, the happy laughter and friendly noise from the other rooms, came pleasantly in to where we were standing. And at last, for a certainty, I experienced a moment of rare insight, in which I became aware of the real reason in all the so-called madness of woman's work, and understood clearly why the cleaning, the cooking, the scrubbing, although as burdensome and difficult as ever, still paid their way.

"I'll probably start complaining as soon as the last guest leaves," I said, smiling at John. "But right now, darling, I can honestly say: 'A lot of work, but worth it too.'"

CHAPTER EIGHT



Growing Pains

*M is for the many things that plagued us,
O is for the oaths we swore around,
T is for the times we almost faltered,
H is for the happiness we found,
E is for the everlasting labor,
R is for its revelry and worth,*

*Put them all together, they spell MARRIAGE,
The word that has the sweetest sound on earth!*

—with apologies

The most astounding, unhonored miracle of modern times, is modern marriage. With few exceptions, from the first kiss to the first quarrel and “forever after,” it is the only voluntary human relationship where two people, two separate, discordant entities, cheerfully set out to balance a social, psychological, and personal budget that makes the national military one look like kindergarten arithmetic, and actually succeed. More significantly, moreover, it is also the only field of human activity, beginning with the Battle of Jericho and ending with the Battle Sessions of the United Nations, where human beings have ever even seriously tried.

But compared with the problems arising within a doctor's marriage, all other marriage becomes as simplified as peek-a-boo.

To begin with, John and I had all the usual hurdles that confront any ordinary young couple. This, by the way, does not refer to any triangular complications so dear to the hearts of our cinema industry, that they would have us believe that the famous "other woman" is as much an inherent attribute of marriage as a bed or a wedding ring. I would also like to remind the Author's League, that prosaic as it may seem, statistics show the majority of marriages continue unmolested by this doubtful blessing.

Like most young people coming from totally different general backgrounds and home environments, John and I soon discovered that we matched in very little but our mutual affection.

"Do you absolutely, really, need to sleep on pillows, John?" I asked him one night, long before the gathering of our clan, when this was one of the first of the many "little matters" to start cropping up. The fact that I hated pillows, never used them, and that we shared a double bed—or to be accurate, little more than one half of a double bed—made this question seem very significant.

"I most absolutely, really do," said John, with the solemn conviction of a Communist swearing allegiance to the party.

"But I thought it was supposed to be healthier to sleep without pillows," I persisted, not that either his or my health was my motive.

"Sheer superstition!" was the excoriating reply. "Raising the head during sleep makes for much better drainage of the sinuses."

A doctor-husband, I thought as I put the pillow back on the bed, can be a very annoying, doubtful attribute at times, with his long-winded, high-sounding medical reasons for doing as he pleases. An M.D. is often worn like a coat of bullet-proof armor, and to argue with one is to become Don Quixote fighting his windmill.

"Of course," said John with magnanimous gallantry, once the pillow was safely in place where he wanted it, "if it bothers you at all, why then—"

"That's all right," I said, giving in easily, "this really isn't worth fussing about, is it?"

This philosophy carried us far. For instance, John hated vegetables and would rather swallow a golf ball alive than a single pea, while I was the goose whose sauce was made of cauliflower and broccoli.

"But you tell all your patients how good they are," I protested, after he constantly and consistently treated the greens on his plate as if they were hemlock leaves. "I thought that vegetables had the highest caloric and vitamin content yet. Or is it minerals?"

John was amused. "That stuff's for patients, darling," he answered merrily. "Calories and vitamins and things like that. For me, I eat what I like, and flourish just as well, so why torture myself unnecessarily?"

This was my first initiation into the well-known double standard "Do as I say, not as I do" principle that most doctors follow; but even so, I was scarcely surprised. When I think what a scientific chore the fundamental function of eating has become for so many people, I could see what John meant only too well. It is the unrecognized culpability of the medical profession for this sad state of affairs that I do mind, though.

How often I have watched intelligent men and women in restaurants pull out lists similar in appearance to racing sheets to guide themselves by before daring to order, like fanatic astrologists consulting the stars in their horoscopes before an airplane trip. How often and with what fascination, I would see them turn in horror from certain edibles, as if they were dipped in arsenic, with the proud refrain: "My doctor says I mustn't eat grapefruit" or "I'm not allowed potatoes"; while other foods, like lettuce or turnips, would be greeted as if they were the elixir of life from the fountain of youth itself. And how often, in certain particular cases I have known, I would be shocked to discover that tomorrow's prohibition was yesterday's gravy, and vice versa, with none of the serious followers any the wiser or in the least perturbed.

"That's true enough," John would always say when I pointed this out. "The reason a diet for the same ailment for the same person changes radically from month to month is not that doctors are crazy or liars or fools, but that medical science itself doesn't really know the final answer, and is just groping. Nobody argues much about what a diabetic should eat, because that's been conclusively proved. But ten different doctors will give you ten different diets to follow for something, say, like hypertension, high blood pressure to you, and none are right or wrong."

In our own case, of course, we were unfettered by any rules. As for the element of palate incompatibility, having been raised on the moral of Jack Sprat and the clean plate, I rose to the situation by planning compromise foods in our kitchen, leaving the indulgence of individual tastes to birthdays, when the honored guest chose the menu; festive occasions, when we took fair turns; and all meals consumed in public restaurants. After all, as I told John, what was an ear of corn (my favorite), or a sack of French fried potatoes (John's choice), as compared with a happy home?

As time went on, other and more intricate "bust the bank" problems reared their nasty heads too. Apparently, as I quickly learned, while a mutual love of Bach and a kindred loathing of Gertrude Stein may make the genesis of a very satisfactory courtship, they do not necessarily insure a fine marriage. In wedlock, it is the big things that count most, like: "Why aren't the shirts back yet from the laundry?" "What happened to the three dollars for the milkman that was left on the refrigerator?" and, "Fish again? Oh God!"

Money (that ugly word!) is the root of much unhappy connubial disorder. The original difficulty probably arose because many men labor under the misapprehension that their financial support is the pivotal point of the union, and regard their limited contributions to the family exchequer the way most people look upon their own philanthropy to the displaced persons of Europe. The fallacy is as obvious as the smell of a rotten egg. Any man who honestly adds up

the housekeeping, housecleaning, hostessing, humoring, and companioning services he gets from a wife should realize that he's getting it all for less than wholesale (below even the cost of a cut-rate Geisha girl), and what's more, should be honored to pay. There is no doubt about it: marriage must have been invented by a man.

When I was first married, my mother suggested that John give me a regular allowance each week for my own expenses, or else keep one for himself, and let me pilot us by the bank. Either idea, she insisted, was solid marital principle, and this is unfortunately true. Many husbands and wives abandon community planning completely when the Yankee dollar is involved, and proceed strictly on the political doctrine of "To the victor belongs the spoils," like two hungry dogs scrapping for the same bone.

"I don't like it," said John, when I told him. "Whatever money we managed to get is not mine or yours, but ours. If marriage is a partnership, why shouldn't it extend to the partnership property? Why should either one of us be rationed, with the other in a position to dole out little extras like a special handbag for you, or a humidifier for me? My wallet," he said, with a final flourish, "is yours."

"And mine," I replied generously, "is yours"; while both, I must faithfully record since it might have had some bearing on our initial magnanimous decision, were practically as empty as underwear flapping on a line.

But the principle, thus installed, remained. Its subsequent success, moreover, has often made me doubt those popular tales of feminine extravagance that dot our current fiction. Only a lady on an allowance, without any notion of just what the jackpot behind her is, will recklessly succumb to each new dress that she sees, or fall victim to each new hat. The average American wife, if entrusted with the family funds, is as careful of her charge as a hen sitting on an egg. No grandiose tipping, no highest-priced entrees on the menu (peculiarly male offenses) are ever tolerated; and frankly, it is

my conviction that if any woman ever got put in the White House, this country would not only balance its budget, but have a beautiful nest egg besides.

Personally, the responsibilities of economy have been so deeply ingrained upon my nervous system, that I am beginning seriously to wonder if I will ever be able to casually order filet mignon as if it were corned beef hash, even if I ever get the proverbial million dollars. My only consolation is that such danger is minimal.

Another treacherous area in marriage involves personal temperament. Many of these basic differences are as irreconcilable as a mink coat on a starving Chinese coolie or a silk hat on a rickshaw boy; and the resulting deadlock is inevitable. In these cases, a good-humored tug of war is the only solution, and the scorecard reads like a never-ending championship heavyweight bout ("Both fighters are in the center of the ring exchanging hard body blows to the mid-section!"), with no final decision.

John and I had our own No-Man's Land. It was astounding to discover, for instance, in fairly quick time, that John, who was a vigilant Paul Revere and Jack Dalton rolled into one where his medical practice was concerned, was "What you can do tomorrow, never do today," otherwise. This male creed, which resulted in door-knobs that were rarely replaced, suits that never got to the tailors until they were beyond reclaim, and pictures that were tardily hung, was not very endearing to my own mind, whose motto was, "A stitch in time leaves you free tomorrow."

"What's your hurry?" and "I've been waiting for two weeks already" were the major and minor themes of our marital duet, and the discord, though frequent, was not really unpleasant or grave.

There was also the seemingly small, but to me, all-important matter of going to sleep. Simple, humdrum business, you may think, but not for us. By habit and inclination, I preferred a late bedtime, and a late rising whenever feasible, while John had been hopelessly indoctrinated with "early to bed, early to rise," and so forth. To add the final, destructive straw, I soon discovered that whereas it in-

variably took me thirty or more minutes to drift off; for John a pair of pajamas and a comfortable bed acted like an overdose of morphine in the arm.

Psychiatrists, as I am well aware, have some fancy labels to attach to both states of mind, but naturally, these were of no help to either of us. All psychology, incidentally, is very much like this. Whether a particular mental disorder is traced to a great grandmother's dislike for green apples, or a red balloon in a frustrated childhood, the curative value is almost nonexistent; first, since there is no actual standardized treatment available, and second, since if the sufferer had the necessary will power to overcome the complex by mere analysis and suggestion, he probably wouldn't have developed it in the first place.

The difficulty in synchronizing our sleeping habits was further complicated by my desire to rehash the day's events, like a courtroom summation, before retiring. John's sleeping grunts, on the few occasions when I tried this "man to man" talk, were definitely incapable of passing for conversation, and I found, to my disgust, that I was delivering an unappreciated Shakespearian soliloquy.

"Why don't you just go to sleep like I do?" he asked, finally, when I complained about having to stay up alone in the dark.

"I can't," I said. "I told you that I never could."

"It's easy," John answered smugly. "Just close your eyes, and that does it. Soft bed, closed eyes, and the rest comes like a conditioned reflex."

"You're a brute," I groaned, and turned away.

Gradually, however, we settled down into a kind of compromise routine. This ultimate harmony, with both sides wiggling like cornered worms, was comparatively easy to achieve in view of our mutual excitement and preoccupation with the panorama of medical practice and daily living unfolding before our eyes. There was actually almost a physical lack of time in which to develop these many minor disagreements into major warfare. A good screwdriver and a lot of work to do, combined with the economic struggle for

existence, will often delay that first, inevitable misunderstanding indefinitely, although not, as John and I soon discovered, forever.

Before our private Battle of the Bulge took place, though, there were those terrific doctor-marriage hurdles to overcome next. Beside these, the previous adjustments as to toothpaste caps, and misplaced bills became as insignificant as mosquitoes on the Empire State Building.

"Isn't it just too, too thrilling to be married to a doctor?" is a common question symbolizing one of the most universal delusions of this century. As far as I can see, there is nothing thrilling about being on call twenty-four hours out of twenty-four, getting up in the middle of the night because someone else isn't asleep, answering to the description of devil or deity, depending upon the gossiping patient's point of view, and the current state of his indigestion, and generally, having about as much privacy and freedom as the men's room in Radio City.

Then there are these chosen people who, while conceding the romanticism of John's calling, like to say sympathetically: "You must be terribly jealous to have to let your husband go off alone to see beautiful women in bed, even if they are sick."

To this, there is no reply that is not interpreted as rationalization, sanctification, justification, and too much protestation. After a few tries in this general direction, I learned to make my point about the professional attitude by repeating one of John's favorite tales. A well-known proctologist complained about the ordinary physician's reluctance to do rectal examinations on aesthetic grounds. "For myself," said this well-known specialist in rectal diseases, "I would much prefer to insert my finger in a patient's rectum professionally, than to shake hands with the same man socially."

A doctor's wife is often in the same category as a civil servant and a political bigwig. She is supposed to render prompt and efficient service to the community by locating, answering, and delivering professional messages; while at the same time she is expected to smile ingratiatingly at all possible voters, chuck babies appreciatively

under the chins, and spread good will in the immediate vicinity like a visiting Fuller brush man.

She must also be immune to surprise, and devoid of all inhibitions. After once coming home to find John practising on a piece of raw meat with his short wave electrocautery, in anticipation of a patient who was due in the office to have her moles removed by this bloodless weapon; and after taking messages from constipated women who just wanted John to know they had a "beautiful movement today," I qualified in both these respects.

But after three months of tactful diplomatic maneuvering with our neighbors, I told John: "I'll sweep your floors, answer your phone, but I give up on being the contact man for your organization. From now on, I'm going to smile only when I please, and if Mrs. Fitzpatrick wants me to admire her Herman, I'll use my water pistol first!"

Another complicating factor in a doctor's marriage is that sooner or later his wife discovers being married to a physician is almost like living with an Indo-Chinese because of all the language difficulty encountered. Medical vocabulary notoriously makes archaic Greek sound like first-grade English. Whenever I listened to John and his colleagues discuss a case, it was like taking a lesson in double talk.

"Why don't you simply say gall-bladder operation instead of cholecystectomy?" I asked John one night, after he interpreted the word at my request.

"Because that's not the medical term," he replied righteously.

"Bosh," I answered indignantly. "You doctors just like to sound important. It's almost as bad as a secret code. Besides, it confuses patients and frightens them, like Latin writing on a prescription that makes ordinary aspirin read like doomsday."

"Look who's talking," laughed John. "What about you lawyers? You take one thousand words to say 'Fifty dollars, please,' and twist the English language by some hocus pocus so that it sounds like an exercise in irregular French verbs. At least we doctors put in *bona fide* substitutes."

I could see his point very well. Legal language has always seemed unnecessarily cumbersome too. The ordinary brief, filled with "whereas, inasmuch, heretofore," and other such useful terms, is like a fruit cake overstuffed with raisins, and nuts and plums, until one can think sympathetically of the laborer who said to his boss: "What's this party of the first part, and party of the second part? I thought this deal was just between you and me."

Personally, whenever I wanted to sound like a great jurist in the course of my legal career, I merely inverted my verbs before my nouns, like a cart before a horse, added a few dozen of the stock phrases heretofore referred to in the aforementioned paragraph, deemed relevant, material and competent (see what I mean)?, and wound up with a paper that sounded like the preamble to the Constitution written in pig Latin. If half of the resultant copy made no sense to me, neither did it to anybody else, which saving feature is the fundamental explanation for the success and perpetuation of lawyers.

Having been uncovered in my glass house by John's denunciation of legal talk, and knowing full well the improbability of my ever converting the medical profession to good sense, I set out to learn their code. All good marital experts advise a woman to share her husband's interests and understand his work, an exhortation really worth following. Of course, I do sometimes wonder if I would have been quite so anxious to oblige had I married an undertaker or a street cleaner. As is, coached and encouraged by John who was pleased to see my interest, I read the basic medical texts from cover to cover with the aid of a fat medical dictionary, and emerged triumphantly with terms like "subacute bacterial endocarditis," or "bilateral salpingo-oöphorectomy" flying as glibly off my tongue as ham and eggs.

In his first excitement at my progress, John exhibited my repertoire wherever we went. Even after the first flush wore off, his Pygmalion pleasure in my new accomplishment never failed. At his insistence, I went to medical conferences, hospital staff rooms, and all

professional meetings with him, until gradually, as if to compensate for the grueling grind and imprisonment of practical doctoring, a whole new world appeared before my eyes.

Medicine is a fascinating study, and doctors no less so. Before my intimate contact with the profession, I used to think as many people do, that doctors were superior beings, superior in knowledge, power and judgment, given to philanthropy, benevolence, and love for the human race. How often had I seen people reverently accept a physician's dumbest remarks about the weather as if they were listening to Solomon's wisdom! Even the tobacco companies have turned to the medical men for corroboration, endorsement, and popular inducement of a cigarette brand, as if thus offering the public the final, irrefutable mark of approval. Even the lowly toidy seat today needs recommendation by the Council of the American Medical Association!

How shocking therefore to step behind the glamorous iron curtain and see the men for what they are, even as you and I. Where were the sacred cases offered for professional consideration when they met as a group in the sanctity of the staff rooms? Where were the lofty, scientific discussions, the perplexing diagnoses, the most recent advances in medicine?

Imagine my surprise to discover that these oracular staff-room discussions always included a good, new place to eat: "The lobster was incredible!" a wonderful play they had seen: "Best show on Broadway," a detailed account of the new revue at a local night club: "Man! Can she swing it!", and the intimate, intricate histories as to the inner workings, costs, and general performances of their most recent automobiles. When they finally got down to trading actual cases, it was never done in the Hippocratic manner of furthering science, but always and strictly in the spirit of "Who caught the biggest fish?"

The narrator at any given time would be sure to extoll his own unusual acumen, and not so subtly either. He would relate the facts of a particular case with the casual omission of one or two key symp-

toms, pertinent laboratory reports, and then dare anyone to make the diagnosis, like a safe owner who imparts two-thirds of the combination, and then looks surprised when his secretary can't open it. Of course, no one could make the diagnosis under such conditions, whereupon the speaker, satisfied with his successful tale, would probably furnish the information it probably took him two weeks to discover, as if it were as easy as dropping a penny in a piggy bank.

"Phooey," said John, as we drove home after one of these typical sessions, "those guys in there must be treating horses, not people."

But most of it was pure fun, and John and I were close in an unusual kind of way, so that I could finally realize why medicine, to him, was not only a job, but a way of life. We shared a companionship that can be found only when two lovers are coworkers as well.

"I don't know why you bother with all that medical stuff," Elsie Poole told me one night, when she and her husband, an aspiring internist at the hospital, were visiting us at home. "For me," she said, twirling her big diamond ring, "I just want to know, 'How much do we have to spend?' and he can worry about the rest from there."

This was customary doctor's wife doctrine, and I smiled uncomfortably in an attempt not to argue the point.

"Is it true that you go about with John all over town on his calls, whenever you have the time?" Edith Chester, another visitor asked.

"Look," I said, with apparent annoyance, seizing the bull by the horns, "how often do you see Dick?"

"Not much," she admitted thoughtfully. "He's out on calls or busy with office hours and hospital work all day. He usually makes dinner, of course, but afterward there are meetings, and organizations. Even on Sundays he makes house calls too!"

"That's what I mean," I said eagerly, and then asked as a bit of a tease: "Why don't you go along also?"

As I finished speaking, I noticed that this gathering, like most doctor parties, was divided into two distinct camps, with the men in one corner talking shop, and the women in the other talking

house. The arrangement suddenly seemed so much like the adolescent parties of my early teens, where the bashful boys slouched on one side of the room, and the embarrassed girls giggled on the other, that I had to leave the room to laugh.

"What's funny?" asked John, who had followed me out.

"The sex-caste system," I said, and explained what I meant.

"Let's break it up," John said, laughing too.

And we did. After the first few unconventional acts, the others came easily, and soon it was hospital gossip that at Dr. B's house, everybody talks shop. Imagine!

As a doctor's wife, also, I had to extend invitations to the hospital chiefs, who were, in a sense, John's bosses, although I definitely disapproved of his hospital aspirations.

"It would be fine if you were closely related to the head of the medical board by blood or marriage," I told John over and over again, "but this way it's too precarious. It's like trying to get work in a closed shop, when they won't even let you join the union."

Since he persisted in his ambition, however, I stood by to help him get ahead. One day he telephoned in a dither: "Old Malcolm's coming home with me to visit this afternoon at three. Roll out the carpet and cross your fingers," he said and hung up.

Old Malcolm was the chief in surgery, and I was prepared to give the devil his due. I ran into Freda's for the loan of the lace doily and gold-plated dishes (her great grandmother's) that I had refused for our family affair, and with her material and spiritual help, emerged with enough nuts and candies and fruit and little sandwiches for a charity bazaar.

"Leave it in the kitchen all fixed," said Freda, "and at the right moment, drag it out as if your ten servants prepared it for you."

"I certainly will," I promised happily, so busy putting my best foot forward that I subsequently tripped.

When John and Dr. Malcolm arrived, I ushered them into the living room as if it were the king of England and his staff. Dr. Malcolm, I was surprised to note, as we all sat down, was a timid, little,

bald man of about fifty, with a tanned wrinkled skin, and thick glasses. His hands hung limply from his wrists "in order to," he explained as I stared, "create a state of complete relaxation," and he shook them loosely to demonstrate. He wore an untidy, simple suit that looked like a used laundry sack and would have made a grade A hobo retreat in dismay, his shoes were not mates, and he had two ties around his neck.

"Have I?" he asked, when I couldn't resist pointing out this latter absurdity. "Oh yes, I forgot I already had one on." He calmly removed the outer tie and put it in his pocket, while casually continuing his former conversation. As I sat and watched his foggy movements with fascination, Dr. Malcolm reached in a side compartment of his jacket for a handkerchief and dropped a few theater tickets in the process.

"Your tickets, sir," John said, picking them up.

"Mine?" asked Malcolm in surprise. Then, adjusting his glasses for a better look, he said: "So that's where they were all the time. Were for last night," he explained, as if six dollar tickets were ten cent chances on a lottery board, "but I couldn't find them, so we couldn't go."

For the entire period of his visit, I could not stop watching his slightest absent-minded gesture; so much so that it was not until he got up at four o'clock sharp to go, that I remembered all my elegant preparations in the kitchen.

"Oh, John," I wailed, as the door closed behind Dr. Malcolm, "Come see what I did!" I led him into the kitchen where my resplendent feast stood in untouched glory.

"It doesn't matter," John said consolingly. "He's so dizzy he wouldn't know anyway, would he?"

We both laughed. "Eat your dinner," I said, offering the sandwiches. Then I gasped, "What a character! How can he tell the difference between an appendix and an infected finger?"

"But I tell you he's a whiz at surgery," John insisted. "The best

man we've got! Except for those little tricks he pulls. You know he's so tiny he operates on a raised stool, or else the table's too high. Well, one hot day last summer, he came into the operating room with nothing at all on underneath his surgeon's gown, and with the back wide open."

"Oh no," I breathed incredulously. "What happened?"

"Nothing," said John, obviously proud of his association with this personality, like a little boy boasting about how his Uncle Zeke killed three men before the cops caught him. "The nearest nurse tied his gown up behind, and saved the day."

A few days after Dr. Malcolm's visit, John came home with the marvelous news that he had received an appointment on the surgical staff.

"The lowest job in the hospital," he said with shining eyes, as if he had just been named Surgeon General in Washington. "Only a junior adjunct, but at least a start. And under Malcolm's service too!"

"It was my hospitality that clinched it," I laughed, as we swung about the room in a victory dance. Then we stopped in a real photo finish. "Oh darling," I exulted, after a satisfactory embrace, "isn't it wonderful? Isn't it grand? I just can't believe it!"

It seemed to me then that my marital education was finally complete. This unity between us, so that I could rejoice in his success as if it were my very own was like a heady wine. But the degree I so rapidly pinned upon my chest was shortlived. Almost immediately, as inevitable in its occurrence, and as interminable and agonizing in its duration as a bad case of adolescent acne, our first major quarrel loomed upon the horizon.

The very next morning after John's appointment was confirmed, and just four weeks after the family confab, was the day of our sixth monthly wedding anniversary. I awoke early and lay watching John who was still asleep. If, after a mere honeymoon, I had felt as experienced at matrimony as Adam and Eve on their golden

jubilee, it certainly is not to be wondered at that after six months of being married I felt that what I knew would make Peggy Hopkins Joyce look like an amateur.

"Half a year," I murmured happily, since it sounded bigger and better that way, "and how far we've come! Not a single real big fight, just as we planned. We really have a different kind of marriage."

It was a very, smug, satisfied, silly lady who reached over to kiss her husband awake. "Good morning, sleepy head," I said, anxious to begin this special day.

What a special day!

My first disappointment came with the absence of any greeting from John in the early mail. On all other occasions, meaning the five before, and Christmas, there had been many evidences of nuptial celebration. The gifts that had always arrived on time with a minimum of expenditure and a maximum of fanfare, had been graciously received, even when one of them turned out to be a horrifyingly expensive hand made, imported, Angora wool sweater, instead of the customary tiny bottle of inexpensive perfume, or the monogrammed handkerchief. I had long ago resolved not to let my better judgment discourage John in his characteristically unsound male attentions. So intent was I in proverbially valuing the thought over the content, that I would have accepted with a grateful smile anything from a box of cigars to a pregnant cow.

And the love letters that accompanied these offerings (although their length gradually dwindled in inverse proportion to the age of our marriage), always seemed to my prejudiced eyes to be nobler than the *Song of Songs* and of such magnificent proportions that, comparatively, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's love sonnets sounded like high-school infatuation.

But this day nothing happened.

Could he have forgotten? The traitorous thought came, unbidden, into my head as I made the bed, and I tried to banish it quickly, as



if I had been caught harboring fugitives from a chain gang in my cellar. But the feeling persisted, and I plowed through my morning's work like a charwoman with a heavy hangover. I washed the dishes as noisily as possible, and I tore at the bedclothes with the active resentment of a sweatshop worker.

"What's the matter, dear?" John asked anxiously, as I all but dumped his coffee in his lap.

"Nothing," I replied tartly, turning away and failing to realize that John was too much a novice as yet to have learned that when a woman says "Nothing" in a wounded tone of voice, it means, "Everything."

When the time came to leave for school, I offered my cheek to John as if it were only a cardboard facsimile of the same, and was furiously enraged when he didn't even notice the difference.

"Boy, oh boy!" he said excitedly, as I stood in the doorway secretly hoping for some slight sign of his remembrance. "Today," he continued, and I looked up expectantly, sure that this was it at last, "I start on surgical service at the hospital. Maybe I'll get something big to do. Isn't it wonderful?"

Yesterday it was, I thought, as my hope died, but not today. Slamming the door behind me, I ran for the train, where I settled down for a good sulk. Ordinarily, the long ride to law school was useful and enjoyable. I caught up on back homework; I gossiped pleasantly with the many students I met about everything from Professor O'Brien's all-green St. Patrick's day suit to the almost naked blonde chorine that Professor Allen had dragged to the last Prom, and the recent decision in the daily *Law Journal*; and I concluded the excursion by picking myself up a complete collection of daily newspapers without prejudice to color, creed, or size, from the piles left behind by departing passengers. Sanitary scruples never bothered me.

But that fateful day, I just sat. "I won't say a word to remind him," I decided mournfully, biting off my nose in the eternal femi-

nine way to spite my face. My dreary thinking continued all through class, and carried me home again. "Romance!" I thought angrily, on the way back. "I might have known how it would end!"

It didn't seem possible that only yesterday I had felt so close to John, and that only this morning I had been so foolishly happy. And today—

I arrived home in time for office hours, and after a hurried sandwich in the kitchen, went right to work.

"This is what I really am," I raged inwardly as I smiled sweetly at Mrs. Giglione's twins, and commented cheerfully on Mr. Hansen's fractured foot: "A slave in his house! Someone to work for him!"

"What on earth's the matter?" John whispered from time to time. "What's happened?"

But I was set on dying for my cause. "Nothing," I snarled, and moved back to the patients, as if his presence were a remote apparition.

Unfortunately, it was a very busy day. Following afternoon hours, John had to rush out on some calls. He phoned finally from the hospital to say he was detained on a ward case, and would eat there, so I needn't wait dinner. "As if I want dinner!" I thought, hanging up angrily, ready to make my stomach the eternal scapegoat it always is.

It wasn't until after evening hours, about nine o'clock, that we ultimately had a chance to talk.

"Now," said John firmly, cornering me in the treatment room before the door even really closed behind the last patient. "What's it all about? What's wrong?"

My pride spoke up again. "Nothing at all," I repeated gloomily, sounding like Bette Davis in a histrionic death scene. "Now let me do my work."

I tried to free my hand, but John said determinedly, "That's what you said all day!" Then he changed his tone of voice. "Please, darling," he pleaded, "I thought we were going to share everything.

I've been so worried all day. I know something's wrong. Can't you tell me?"

The new attack upon my former resolutions unnerved me, and my defenses crumpled. "It's our sixth-month anniversary," I sobbed into the office towel, "a whole half year! And you forgot!"

John stopped still as if I were a soothsayer announcing the Ides of March. He looked as stricken as if he had just heard himself accused and found guilty of the most serious crime in the book, involving moral turpitude.

"Oh, sweetheart," he said, when he found his voice, "I'm so sorry. I don't know how it slipped my mind. Won't you forgive me?"

As if I would that easily. "You never forgot before," I persisted in pressing my charges.

"I never was this busy before," he pleaded valiantly.

"Only six months," I moaned, starting to cry again, "and you don't care for me any more!"

"I do," he said, speaking more loudly.

"You don't. You don't love me or you wouldn't ignore me," I was approaching the height of my own crescendo, like a mezzo-soprano reaching for high C. "Oh, oh," I wept.

"That's silly," yelled John, beginning to get angry too. "You know I love you," he shouted, as if he were hurling invectives at a bill collector.

"And now you're screaming at me," I screamed, my own anger fizzing up like an Alka Seltzer.

Just then the doorbell sounded piercingly above our noise, and we automatically ceased arguing, like the sudden dispersal of sidewalk brawlers at the sound of a police siren. In the unexpected silence, the doorbell rang again.

"Want to play possum?" John recovered first. "Should I ignore it?"

"Who could it be at this hour?" I wondered aloud. Then the bell rang again. "You get it," I said to John, hurriedly wiping my eyes, and blowing my nose in the towel. "I'll be right out."

By this time, both of our voices had dropped to their normal levels in the usual metamorphosis that most husbands and wives undergo when company nears in the midst of a quarrel. Verily, verily, marriage is a private affair.

When I came into the living room a few minutes later, Bob and Agnes were seated on the couch, each looking very much like the whale must have after he swallowed Jonah.

"How nice of you to drop in like this," I said, coming close, and realizing what an asset conventional training can be, so that the right words can be trusted to come out at the right time, even while the mind pursues its own course.

"We've got something to tell you," Bob said, with suppressed excitement, and my apathy lifted a little.

For months now I had been marking their romantic progress the way a speculator watches the stock market, and hoping that finally the wolf in Bob might be turned into the nuptial lamb. John would say, when I voiced the thought aloud: "Why do all married women like to pair everyone else off, like professional matchmakers? Could it be that misery loves company?"

"On the contrary," I would reply, "we're just spreading the gospel of happy marriage," a truth based upon the fact that there is no greater preacher than the new convert.

Watching the expression of pleased importance on Bob's face now, I asked, "You don't really mean you're getting . . . ?" I paused in astonishment.

"Married," they both concluded. "We are."

"And soon," said Agnes. Her face was flushed and prettier than before. There was a new confidence and happiness in her voice, and she seemed to have acquired the courage to use it. "I'm not going to let him change his mind," she laughed gaily, but with a hint of serious purpose in her jest. "He might get away!"

Bob grinned self-consciously, while I whispered to John: "Close your mouth." Then the prospective groom said: "Now, Aggie, you know I'm stuck for good," in so fatuous a tone that even I gaped.

What was the famous caterpillar into a butterfly change as compared with this evolvement?

In the silence that followed, John shook his head like a prize fighter clearing his brain to regain consciousness after a knockout blow. Then Agnes said, "We wanted you two to be the first to know, except for our families, of course, because, well, you've both been a kind of inspiration for us right along."

In my present unhappy state of mind, this was pure carbolic acid right on the open wound. But before I could speak, John, now fully recovered, replied, "We're honored, to have you feel that way." Then he grasped Bob and said, "Say, this is wonderful! Agnes has moved the mountain," and we all laughed. This naturally led the way for the customary congratulations and jokes, until Bob and Agnes got up to leave.

"I'm due back at the hospital at ten-thirty," Bob explained, "and I've got to get Aggie home first."

His solicitude with her coat, his proud, responsive replies to her timid "dear" and "honey" talk, all made me silently moralize: "The paths of glory lead but to the altar," but I did not think that this was any time to reincarnate those glories.

Just before they left, Agnes turned back to me impulsively and said, "I hope that Bob and I will be as happy as you and John."

I was obviously emotionally overcome by this final remark, but not in the way Agnes thought. "Ah, if you only knew!" I felt like saying, like the disillusioned woman of the world I now knew myself to be. But John hurried forward, and spoke before any evidence of my demoralization could be noticed: "I hope you will be very happy, Agnes," he said a little sadly, and closed the door.

After their departure, the argumentative wind was primarily out of my sails, and it seemed definitely awkward to return, at this point, to the scene of the crime.

"Well," said John to my stiff back, "imagine that!"

I yielded momentarily to my curiosity. "Are you glad?" I asked, since Bob was his best friend.

"Certainly am," said John, eager to talk to me again. "It means Bob and I can stick together now, and we'll all make a good foursome."

I knew what he meant. The problem of finding satisfactory friends after marriage, where there are four people involved to please, makes the ordinary dual affair seem as simple as shelling peas. But I didn't want to appear too agreeable.

"Foursome," I grunted. "You mean threesome," and I marched into the office to clean up, like a work detail in a prison camp going to the section pile.

"I'll finish cleaning," John said, apparently seeking penance, since his usual approach to this chore was a disappearing act worthy of the Barnum and Bailey tradition.

"I will," I said.

"I'll do it," he repeated.

This time, I ended this "After you, monsieur" game, that often plays such havoc with courtesy and progress, by quickly completing the job myself, and turning off the lights.

John watched me silently and unhappily, like an innocent victim of a bombing raid surveying the scene of his disaster. "Aren't you going to study?" he asked, as I headed immediately for the bedroom.

I had only yesterday loudly proclaimed my intention of doing *Clyde vs. Clyde*, and the ten sets of rules in Evidence this very night, but now, I thought melodramatically, what difference did it make? Abraham Lincoln, I have since decided, may have proved to the satisfaction of a whole nation that a house divided against itself cannot stand, but at that time I, and at present a million ex-GI's, have also demonstrated that a divided mind can graduate.

Mentally slamming my books shut, I sat down on the bed and began to undress.

"Don't you want a bite to eat?" John asked, following me in.

This appeal to connubial custom left me cold. "No," I said grimly

in a "Who is this strange man?" tone of voice, subconsciously realizing that martyrdom doesn't thrive on a full belly (mine was dismally empty) and anxious to add to my crown of thorns.

As I pulled my slip over my head, I suddenly realized the basic futility of all marital arguments, when two people fight it out in the kitchen, and then climb into the same bed at night. The "I'm going home to Mother" act is much too reminiscent of a third-grade comic strip for popular acceptance, and the average three-room apartment offers no alternative. But if this was a deadlock, I was determined to beat my head against the wall. I got into bed, and lay meticulously only on my side, trying to pretend that the rock of Gibraltar and the original Maginot Line were between us both.

"Oh, darling," John begged, reaching across the invisible barrier. "Let's not fight. I didn't mean to forget. It just slipped my mind. I said I'm sorry. Won't you forgive me, dear?"

In my saner moments, I may stop to appreciate the humor and pathos of the ordinary husband's burden of birthdays, anniversaries, and religious and private holidays, not to speak of the commercial Mother-Father-Sister-Brother days. But even today, in my average moments, I do what I did then. I moved brusquely still further away in the bed, until one good breath would have sent me over the edge.

Finally, after twenty more minutes of this intelligent type of conversation, John succumbed, as always, to the stimulus of the soft bed, and fell asleep. As I lay there listening to the sounds in the quiet house—the water dripping in the bathroom sink, a creaking board, the steady humming of the refrigerator in the kitchen—I grew more and more unhappy. For my money, people who speak of the pleasures of quarreling in terms of the joyful reconciliation are as ridiculous as if they were to laud a toothache because the pain has stopped.

Listening for nocturnal noises in general, real and imaginary, is my specialty. Induced by a vague kind of fear of the dark, this particular occupation has become quite an art with me, and I have

little difficulty nowadays in distinguishing between the faint creak of a cockroach crossing the kitchen floor and the slightly louder noise of a carpenter ant in the foyer.

"What's there to be afraid of?" John would boast, when I confessed how I felt. "With me here too?"

Any good tabloid could tell him the relevant subject matter; and as for his significant presence, especially when he was asleep, it was as reassuring as Beethoven's plaster bust on the piano.

But this night, as I listened, I heard a real, terrifying noise that sounded, beside the usual lesser ones, like an oil tanker explosion or the mating call of Gargantua the Great.

"John!" I was up in bed, clutching at him hard. "Do you hear it?"

This routine having taken place upon other occasions, unfortunately, he refused to accept my wolf.

"Go to sleep," he groaned sleepily.

"Sh!" I whispered, hearing it distinctly again. "Just listen!" Only half awake, he sat up too, and in the silence that followed, we could both clearly hear the sounds of a window being fumbled with.

"In the office. The alleyway window!" Wide awake now, he made the explanation as if it were a complicated diagnosis.

"Oh," I could scarcely speak. "Call the police, hurry!" I gave him the telephone number of the radio car squad, which I had secretly engraved on my brain in neon lights for something like this.

In one minute we phoned; in another, we grabbed our robes. John, who had obviously seen too many movies, was all for going straight in and taking charge.

"I'll go in," he said, like Dick Tracy commanding the Gangbusters.

"Oh, no, darling," I said, forgetting my grievances and anger for the first time. "You might get hurt. Stay here. Please!"

Fortunately for my feelings and John's ego, just then with a screeching of sirens and brakes, two police cars drove up and settled the issue. We let two policemen in the front door, while two others went round the back. It was better than any motion picture

I had ever seen. They ran with drawn guns, and shouted to the housebreaker in the alley: "Stop or we'll shoot!"

"The blessed name of the Law," I thought, reassured by their grim faces and impressive firearms, and beginning to enjoy it all.

"Isn't it thrilling?" I whispered to John, who looked at me as if I had been hit on the head and was developing acute idiocy.

Before he could reply, however, the police reappeared, looking a little foolish, as they came forth dragging a half unconscious drunk who kept slobbering: "I wanna go home. Home Shweet Home. I wanna go home."

It was a little like using a fire-extinguisher to blow out a match, and we all burst out laughing.

"We'll take you home, all right, to the county jail," said the policeman in back, and I uttered a cry of recognition.

"Officer Kelly," I said happily, as he came forward. "I haven't seen you since that accident case. That old man, remember?"

"Sure and I do," he said, shaking hands heartily with John and me. "Never found the old geezer either. Probably belonged near by. Well, you had yourself a little scare tonight, didn't you?"

Suddenly, it was like Old Home Week, and we all laughed and toasted our good spirits with a round of beers. Then we said a gay farewell with thanks to the whole Police Department, locked up, and went happily back to bed still talking it over.

"Say," I said suddenly, sitting up straight, "I'm supposed to be mad at you. Remember?"

John pulled me down beside him. "You forgave me," he said teasingly.

"I did not," I murmured, close in his arms.

"But you do now," said John. "I'm really sorry, darling. I'll never forget again."

"And I was silly," I replied penitently. "And there's nothing to forgive."

After a long moment, I spoke once more: "Let's never fight ever, ever again," I said.

"Never," said John fervently, sounding as if a milestone had been reached and passed. "Darling, it was awful, it was terrible!"

"I know," I said, suddenly realizing too that we probably *would* fight again and again, over many things to come, but those would never, really, matter any more than this did now. "It was terrible," I agreed, hugging him hard, "but it was also marriage."

And this miraculous revelation was like the new start of a happy, married life!

CHAPTER NINE



Into Each Life

*Out of the germs that covered me
Thick as the night from pole to pole,
I swear by all the gods that be,
No man is captain of his soul!*

*In the fell clutch of feeling sick,
Oh, how I winced and cried aloud;
Under the bludgeonings of fate,
There is no master left unbowed.*

—with apologies to Henley's "Invictus"

Illness is like a mighty day of judgment. It sweeps into the pettiness of daily life—the harsh word, the careless reply, the forgotten anniversary—and strips us bare of everything but the basic truths. It is one of the greatest common denominators mankind knows. But who on earth wants to be reduced?

I had expected to wake up after that very unusual sixth-month celebration feeling like Columbus on the day he docked. Instead of which, I got out of bed like a dishcloth emerging from a Bendix washing machine. My head seemed to be stuffed with solid cement, and there was that sick, grippy feeling in my body that I have

learned could mean anything, or everything, or nothing, from meningitis to dandruff.

"You look awful," my mother said when she stopped by. "Do you have a fever? Let me feel your head."

Instinctively I moved away. For years I had undergone these maternal scrutinies to determine if my eyes were swollen, or my nose was red, and always on the eve of the class dance or a club picnic. "Don't start borrowing trouble. I'm feeling fine," I said, trying to sound like a seasoned commando ignoring a flesh wound.

"Well, I don't know," she persisted, "I don't like how you look. Why don't you tell John? After all, he is a doctor." Which was exactly why not. The philosophy of a doctor's personal doctoring is as indeterminable as the Irish sweepstakes, and as paradoxical as caviar in the Automat. Just as in ordinary matters the average physician's medical care for his family makes the delinquent cobbler with his shoeless children seem like a paternal philanthropist, so in case of actual illness his concern and fear are magnified beyond normal proportions.

He may scorn the routine headaches, and colds, and minor complaints that are only nine-tenths of the common ailments of daily living, but give him a genuine symptom, and he is beyond restraint. An earache becomes an imminent mastoid; a mongrel gas pain brings him bloody visions of appendicitis; and a simple strain sounds to his delicate fingers like a compound fracture with visible displacement of the bone.

Even when we were first married, I was forced to accept this displeasing incongruity, so that eventually I could almost cheerfully have decapitated some of those slap-happy people who refused to understand why it was *not* wonderful "to have a doctor in the house!" There are many, many times when a woman wants the consolation of a husband rather than the attention of a physician; and when the two are one, unfortunately, she frequently gets neither.

I remember one time when we were married about three months, when I fell and twisted my ankle. "Now look, John," I protested, when he insisted on an X-ray as if I had just been pried out of a head-on collision, "it's obviously only a simple strain. I've had them before. Why do you worry about every little thing from a cut finger to a shaving nick?"

He smiled sheepishly. "Because I love you," he teased, and I smiled too.

"But tell me really why," I asked again, so he tried to explain.

"I suppose it's because I know all the bizarre and incurable things in medicine," he said, "and I see so much of sickness everywhere, that I dread its happening here. Do you see?"

I saw only a little better than I saw the theory of relativity, but I nodded; in medicine, a little knowledge is a blessing. But I still found his subsequent behavior irreconcilable and objectionable.

After an X-ray was taken (he usually was as victorious in things of this kind as Hitler in his heyday) and he was reassured that there was no break in my bone, John simply forgot the whole matter.

"Aren't you going to tape it up?" I asked, after a long day's limp. "That's what you did to Mrs. Wilson's ankle, and that's what the camp doctor did to me the last time it happened."

John was relaxing as usual, with a medical journal, and while I questioned this type of literature as a means of recreation, I dared not say so aloud in view of the Perry Mason corpses and gory stilettos that furnished mine. "Let it alone," he grunted, without even looking up. "It'll heal up. Nothing serious. Just let it alone."

Such sympathy! Such concern! I remembered enviously how carefully Mr. Wilson had ushered Mrs. Wilson into the office, practically trying to walk for her himself, and acting as if she were a victim of Dachau, instead of a sidewalk strain. His "watch it now, dear," his "lean on me, honey," his "let me help you" commiseration rang like ominous thunder in my ears besides John's complacent dismissal.

"Must I break a leg to make you take notice?" I demanded angrily; but John, engrossed in "Potassium Chloride in the Non-specific Diarrheas" hardly heard.

The next day my ankle still bothered me a little, and my wounded feelings a great deal, so I determined on a new course.

Just as the last evening patient was leaving, I sat down in the waiting room, and said when John opened the door: "I'm next."

He looked surprised, but gallantly seized the cue, "Come right in, madame," he said professionally, and then, dropping the act, stretched and said, "Gosh, I'm tired."

"Not too tired if I were Mrs. Gwendolyn Xanthippy!" I hurled this out as if it were a grand jury indictment.

He stopped stretching. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"My ankle hurts. I want it taped, or at least I want a short-wave treatment like you gave Mrs. Wilson. If I were a patient I'd get one!" I said heatedly. "Well, I'll be one. I'll pay you—or you can send the bill to my husband!"

John started to laugh. "Look, darling," he said, coming over to me, "I'd never neglect you ever. I promise. But a short-wave treatment at best can only give temporary relief, oh say, for a few hours or so, but that's all. Any other benefit Mrs. Wilson got was pure psychological effect. And you can't get that since I've told you better. Now, do you understand?"

"But I want psychological effects too," I answered, but I had to learn to do without.

Gradually, I came to accept the doctor's philosophy of personal medicine, although I never liked it or wholly understood it. I too acquired a skeptical attitude toward all medications and treatments except those specifically known to be guaranteed, effective aids in curing illnesses. "Don't people love pills, though?" I asked John wistfully, when I saw the literal tons of sample tablets and drugs that flooded the office, and which he, in turn, handed on to patients.

"They certainly do," he replied. "All these proprietary and

prescription medications can't do much good mostly, but they can't do any harm, either. And psychologically, the results are unbelievable!"

That I knew. The greatest mystery of modern medicine, at least to me, is how people can swallow red or blue or green liquids that, underneath their fancy labels, actually contain nothing but vitamin B, or aspirin mixed with sugar water, and then report the most astounding reactions, from a totally unconnected attack of rheumatism, to poison ivy. How often I secretly yearned also for the wonderful feeling it must be to take a pill, confidently expecting miracles, and get them!

But such thinking, in our house, was lower than Benedict Arnold's. With true professional Spartanism, our medicine cabinet was (and still is!) bare of any voodoo bottles except for aspirin for headaches, hair tonic for John, cosmetics for me, and a little iodine, or metaphin, or any other antiseptic that was most recently received in the mail.

"No cough medicine? No pills?" my mother demanded as if we were nonbathing cannibals. "I've never seen civilized people live like this!"

Like many lay people I have met, my mother was under the erroneous impression that a doctor's home probably came equipped with sterilizers in the kitchen, diathermy machines in the bedroom and autoclaves in the bathroom; that he and his family were daily germproofed, vitamin laden, hormone injected, and vaccinated; that only food approved by the Council on Food and Drugs of the American Medical Association was consumed; and that prophylactic fumigations of the whole house took place periodically.

Her immediate reaction to the routine John and I followed was like that of a child who suddenly discovers that there is no Santa Claus. For her sake only, I sometimes wished that we might have been one of that literal-minded minority among physicians who do

come close to her ideal. These men (a minority, I repeat) read every controversial medical article published without even sensing the controversy, and listen to the glib sales talk offered by the detailmen without discounting the bias.

In some of their homes where I visited, vitamins and iron tablets are actually served on a tray with each meal, like a round of cocktails. The caloric content of the food distributed is as carefully balanced as a hospital menu for a postoperative; there are radiographic plates made for each member of the family, all organs included; morphine injections are casually given for bad headaches as if they were chiclets; nightly sedation for those who might not sleep well is passed out like after-dinner mints; and all the latest medical fashions are so thoroughly incorporated into their lives that in the days of the high colonic irrigation fad, whole families of them were scrubbing their insides out through a rubber hose, while at the present time, most of them lack teeth, tonsils, gallbladders, and wombs, in a wholesale effort to prevent further focal infection. What foolish crimes are committed in the holy name of science!

But John and I were, if anything, too far from such danger. After six months of marriage, I felt as supercilious about ordinary diseases as an ermine wrap next to a skunk jacket in a department store elevator. "Just a hangover from too much excitement," I told myself after my mother left with her dire forebodings; "of course I won't tell John."

But John, when he came home in a little while, didn't need telling.

"Still angry, dear?" he asked. When it came to interpreting my emotions, John could sometimes be as deft as a bank clerk trying to diagnose stomach ulcers.

"Of course not," I said with needless temper. How could he think that after last night?

"Then you don't feel well," he said, a little more definitely. "Let me examine you."

"That's not necessary," I stoically refused. "I'm probably tired

from all that burglar scare last night. A good night's sleep will fix me up fine, you'll see."

But a good night's sleep was as effective as a flit gun on a shark. The next morning found me feeling just about the same, except that now the cranial cement had reached my feet, and my grumpiness had increased. The process of not feeling well always produces strange reactions in different individuals (a fact I can take notice of only when on the highway of health). My mother, for instance, approaches illness with a quiet trust in God; John treats it like a cunning enemy to be meticulously watched and militantly overcome; but I just rant and rave in a kind of illogical, impotent anger, like a coyote baying at the moon.

"Feeling any better?" John asked as he got out of bed.

"Oh, sure, of course I am," I answered belligerently, as if he were questioning my sanity, and I hopped out of bed to prove it. "I can't get sick now," I thought desperately, while I dressed; "there's so much to do!"

"This would be an awful time to be sick," said John, with the clairvoyance that comes when there is only one track to follow: "You're right in the thick of things at school, aren't you, dear?"

Miserably, I nodded. If I had thought our courtship a difficult hurdle to overcome as well as our subsequent solvency, I was fast learning otherwise. Compared to the developments in any ordinary marriage, the most arduous course of "true love" becomes as smooth as the creamy top of a bottle of unhomogenized milk.

When I came home from school that day, I found my mother waiting.

"You still look terrible," was her greeting, as she looked me over like a floorwalker spying a kleptomaniac. "What'd John say?"

"Nothing." I dropped my books on the kitchen table. "And there's nothing for anybody to say," I went on defiantly, in my rush to get lunch.

"Here, let me do that," my mother said, taking the lettuce out of my hands. "It's bad enough that you have to work like this all the

time, but I can't bear to see you doing it when you're sick—all right, then," she amended, as I protested, "let's say, look sick. How that man . . ." and her words trailed off significantly.

I sat down willingly enough, and basked in the unusual warmth of watching someone else work. It seemed like a thousand years since I had done nothing: danced, played tennis, gone to school, wondered about a new date, and slept until noon the day after a party. The chores of wedded bliss settled on my shoulders like a direct hit on the funnel of an enemy ship.

"Oh, yes," said my mother, talking busily above my weary sighs. "Guess whom I saw today?"

Since I hate guessing games, especially when I can't possibly know, I waited instead.

"Victor Bates!" she produced the name with the air of Perry Mason making his final denouement of a crime, and paused for the gallery's applause.

"Vic Bates!" I repeated, properly impressed. "Wasn't he in China or somewheres fighting the Japs? Wasn't that where he wrote me from last?"

This was before World War II naturally, and compared to the magic password value of a military uniform during that conflict, a suit of soldier clothes then was Houdini himself.

"China," said my mother, obviously filled with her share of the glamour and romance in the situation.

"Say, who is this fellow, anyway?" demanded John, coming in from the office.

"Hello, darling," I kissed him quickly. "Vic's an ex-flame of a sort," I said, a little pleased with his obvious annoyance. Wholesale, genuine jealousy in marriage may prove fatal; but heaven knows that a little harmless dose now and then can often be like a shot of adrenalin to a failing heart.

"He's a wonderful boy," my mother said pointedly. "So good looking, so considerate, too. Of course, he hasn't settled down yet, still a little adventurous, but then he's young, only four years older

than you, isn't he?" I nodded my head. "Well," she continued, "I saw him from across the street, but he waved and sent his love, and then I ran into Laura Schumacher, and what do you think? She says he was wounded last month, and that's why he's back. Isn't it thrilling?"

"Imagine!" I breathed, my closest approach to a wounded hero at that time having been the Unknown Soldier.

"What a joy he'll be for the Ladies Sewing Circle," John growled. "I'll bet he uses a cane because he's probably got two whole stitches in his scalp. Let's eat."

After we ate, I thought of Vic again. Victor Bates, the dashing, romantic hero in any girl's life! I couldn't quite remember his face, but I still had the small, carved figures, the strange costumes he had sent me from his travels all over the globe. It wasn't Vic, I realized, as I dried the dishes, it was just a deep nostalgia for a whole carefree way of life, a sudden yearning for a leisurely, glorious past contemplated from the depths of dishtowels and silver polish and weariness.

"Work, work, work," I thought just before I fell asleep that night. "Even my body aches."

The next morning I couldn't get up at all.

"I'm going to examine you whether you like it or not," said John.

"Let me alone," I yelled. "There's nothing the matter with me. I've got to go to school."

"You're feverish," he retorted furiously.

"And you're just making a fuss like always. Remember last time you did?" I asked.

It was perhaps unfair to refer to last time, for certainly John remembered it only too well. We were out driving two weeks before, after a tremendous dinner at a near-by restaurant, when suddenly John got a pain. Now any pain, from a shaving scratch to a common belch, makes a man act as if he were undergoing a hot-iron leg amputation without anesthesia. He groans, he moans, he writhes,

like a penitent at the Wailing Wall, and practically argues his epitaph with his life insurance beneficiaries. So much so, in fact, that I have finally decided that if the men of the world had had to bear and deliver forth the children of all time, the Malthusian theory would have been exploded long ago, and a ride on the subway train during rush hour, would be like being at the opera in a private box.

But when a doctor gets a pain, he makes his wounded brethren look comparatively like Indian fakirs walking stoically over live coals. He not only worries about the diagnosis, and envisions the worst, but he begins to wonder if the autopsy report will confirm it.

With the very first onslaught, John pulled the car up at the curb, cut the motor dead, and sat shock still.

"What's the matter?" I asked in alarm.

"I've got a pain in my chest," he answered. "Here."

"Oh," I said, feeling relieved. Today, I would never have dared to dismiss it so lightly, but then, of course, my ignorance was its own excuse for being. "I told you not to eat that extra potato, besides finishing my pie. It was too much. Let's get home, and you can take some bicarb."

For answer, John groaned, like a death-rattling hippopotamus.

"Is it that bad?" I asked with some surprise. I had often had different kinds of chest pains of insignificant worth, as had everyone else I had ever known. How could I have guessed that this was his own special brand?

"No," John spoke in a whisper.

"Then why and what?" I was genuinely puzzled.

He hesitated. "I'm afraid it might be a heart attack," he reluctantly admitted. "It usually starts with precordial pain, like this."

"Oh, John," I said eagerly, "that's silly. It can't be that; it's probably digestive. Why must you always put fancy names and frightening fears on every little thing? I thought you once told me that coronaries usually occur in the late forties or early fifties, and you're not even thirty."

He still spoke low, when he answered, but with a reassuring firmness that he felt the discussion entailed.

"There are one or two cases on record," he told me, "where coronaries were reported as early as twenty-four and twenty-six. It's in the literature."

All my married life, I have cursed the literature with its dangerous rules and exceptions! All my married life I have yearned for freedom from their tyranny, and my resentment began right there.

"Very well," I said finally, since there was no disputing the Board of Internal Medicine, "let's go home. Can you drive?"

"I'd rather not take a chance on driving," John said. "You'd better phone Bob at the hospital and tell him. He'll know what to do."

"All right." I got out of the car, and, at his request, helped him into the rear where he solemnly lay himself down on the back seat like King Arthur on his funeral barge. "I'll be right back," I said, turning to go to the nearest public telephone, suddenly fully aware of the genuine fear on his face.

"It can't be anything," I told myself furiously, unable to restore my confidence. "It's just his usual medical exaggeration of a simple situation." But I remained unconvinced.

After a quick conversation with Bob who promised to come right by, I walked the few blocks back to the car as if they were the last mile in Sing Sing, and sat down beside John, holding his hand gravely, like a priest administering the extreme unction.

In about five minutes, or even less, Bob rode up in the hospital ambulance, with all the sirens going full blast like a five-alarm fire. "Just you relax," he told us both. "Dr. Gillespie is here," and he got into my place while I waited outside.

"Wanta ride?" Shorty McGurk, the ambulance driver asked. I had always teased for one.

"Not now, Shorty," I said, trying to smile over my worry. "Maybe later."

And then, finally, Bob came out with John following sheepishly.

"What a phony!" Bob said. "Gets a little gas pain and thinks he's dying. I brought along Tony's portable electrocardiograph, and ran a test just to be doubly sure it's negative" (which it proved to be when developed a few hours later) "but all he's got is a plain upper stomach ache."

At first I was so relieved that I threw my arms joyfully about the former condemned man and kissed him. Then I remembered everything, and turned on him in righteous indignation. "Scaring the life out of me! Didn't I tell you it was nothing?" I demanded. "You—you worrier!"

"I'd have felt the same," Bob spoke up, trying to defend John.

"You glorified plumbers!" I raged, climbing in beside Shorty McGurk. "Let's take a ride, Shorty," I said, "and ring all the bells. I've had enough!"

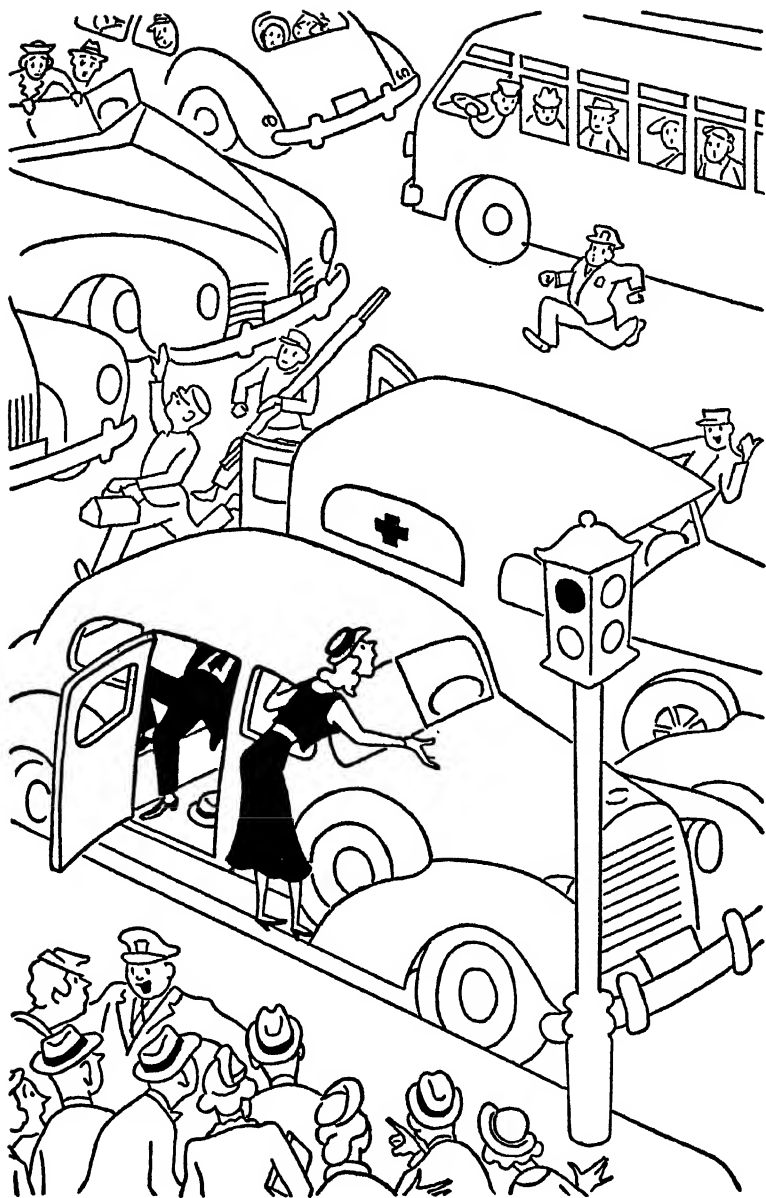
But it was never enough, and I wielded the story like an Amazonian club over John's head, whenever necessary. But that morning, my diversionary move failed. "That's over," John said definitely, "you stay right here. I'll get my bag from the office and examine you."

Since there was no obvious escape, I decided to relax and enjoy myself. "I could use a little rest in bed, anyway," I thought, reaching for a lacy trousseau bed jacket, the kind that are good for burying only, and nothing more active. "And I could also use a little glamour," I decided, but was forced to abandon this idea in view of the distance to my compact.

When John came back with his little black bag, I said, "My, my, aren't doctors' bags getting smaller? You'd never convince a child that his little brother or sister came in that! What's happening to the professional badge of honor?"

John laughed. "Decreasing in size all the time, so that the real big specialists don't carry any. Generally, the size decreases directly in proportion to the way a man's medical standing increases. And now let me take your pulse," he finished, reaching for my hand.

"Not so fast," I said, rolling over to the other side of the bed.



"You've never really examined me before, and I want the works. Come on, let's see your best bedside manner."

"If you want it," John agreed, and as I graciously extended my hand, like Pavlova in the "Dying Swan," he gallantly kissed the palm, and the back, and then started to count my pulse.

"Say," I sat up straight, "does that come with every visit?"

"Only for special patients," he assured me. "Now be still. I have to start all over again."

I felt very silly sitting there, with my hand extended like that as if it belonged to neither of us. As a patient, I have never been a tremendous success. There is an art to lying in bed gracefully, as if it were the most natural occupation in the world, which I was as successful at as Madame Chiang Kai-shek would be in the chorus line of the Follies. With me, the sheets look like soiled laundry in five minutes; the pillows become like battered potato sacks in ten more, and feel like a rock garden; my straightening hair has as much style as a damp floor broom; and generally I look as charming as Boris Karloff in costume. Nothing, in short, like Sarah Bernhardt in *Camille*.

"Quite rapid," John said seriously, as he finished with my pulse. "You must have a high fever. Open your mouth," he continued with alarm, producing his thermometer.

Obediently, I opened, and he stuck it in. Then I spoke again, bobbing the thermometer up and down like a politician with a fat cigar. "Please don't start worrying, John. It's just a gripe, that's all. Don't start building mountains again," I pleaded.

A gripe would have suited me fine: just enough of an illness to rate attention, and yet not enough of a one to inspire any last will and testament scenes. One of the first points in my medical education had been the meaning of gripe: "A gripe is nothing but a bad cold with fever," John had explained, "and like the cold, there is no cure, and little else known about it. It means that the doctor examines the patient and can't find any tangible explanation for the fever. He can't say, 'I don't know why he's sick.' Instead, he

says, 'He's got a grippe,' and everyone is as happy as if he had really diagnosed the case or announced, 'it's a boy.' Grippe is a medical catch-all phrase, and the most useful and abused term in daily practice."

But now, John was in no mood to accept my diagnosis. "You close your mouth, and put the thermometer in right," was his only reply.

As I sat there with the thermometer sticking out of my mouth, I regretted my inability to say things with my eyes the way Hedy Lamarr could when her fever was being rated. In a Hollywood production, illness is as becoming to a star as a Stradivarius to Jascha Heifetz, or a pot belly to Winston Churchill. To me, it was a flop from the opening night, and I felt a surge of self-pity. "Work, work, work," I started my old refrain, "and now this. I bet the gang will be throwing a party for Victor," I thought morosely, "and even the senior dance at law school is coming up. And here I am in bed."

At this point in my happy philosophizing, John removed the thermometer. "One hundred three," he read, sounding more and more disturbed like an Inner Sanctum mystery, but I refused to take him seriously.

"Here we go again," I grumbled, as he started to examine my chest.

"Sh!" John cautioned. "I'm trying to listen."

Suddenly, I noticed that his stethoscope had stopped making its rounds over my body but had settled down in one area only. An ominous silence filled the room, and as I lifted my head to question John, I noticed with astonishment, before he could turn away, that there were tears running down his face.

"John," my voice sounded strange, "you mean it isn't a grippe? You found a spot of pneumonia, didn't you?"

He tried to deny it, but could hardly speak.

"Nothing else would make you feel like this," I insisted. "I want the truth."

There is a whole school of husbands in existence who pride them-

selves on the fact that they always try to keep bad news from "their dear little women." Although I personally could never see the value of inevitably finding out on Thursday what happened on Tuesday, especially, when the bad news thus concealed concerned wars and pestilence and death, I know there are many adherents to this philosophy who like to think they can effectively hide from a lady the fact that a brick just fell on her head. I remember, in particular, the time my Uncle Peter was so pleased with his maneuvering (a full twenty-four-hour-a-day job, with everyone else whispering excitedly and secretly around and about the victim of his charity) because it took my Aunt Jean three whole days before she discovered the passing of a dear but distant relative who was due on Friday for dinner. "Peter is so considerate," said the approving family, "he'd probably try to keep even his own death from poor Jean."

This mistaken benevolence had no place in our lives, and I repeated to John: "I'd rather have it straight."

"All right," he said after a moment's hesitation, "there is a patch of pneumonia."

"Bad?" I tried to sound like Bob discussing an interesting case.

"Not very," he said, trying to be honest, "but bad enough."

All at once, I was terribly afraid. It was as if everything I prized most was being threatened: John and me together, our work, our love, our companionship. What did I care about an idiotic dance or anything like that? All I wanted was to be with John, and feeling like a punished child, I clung to him sobbing aloud.

Then he grew brisk. "What are you crying about?" he asked, furtively wiping his eyes. "We'll start you on sulfa immediately and in a week you'll be fine. You ought to be grateful that we've got such a wonderful drug."

"But in some cases it doesn't work," I wept. "You read that to me last week from the *A.M.A. Journal*. Oh, John, I'm scared!"

"Now who's a medical worrier?" he asked. "I thought you considered me crazy for thinking about exceptional coronaries at twenty-seven?"

"All right," I said, "I'm the worrier." I stopped to blow my nose. "But I caught it from you, so you've only yourself to blame."

"Blame accepted," he answered, trying to laugh. "Now just you lie still, and I'll start doing things."

In a way, it was a relief just to lie back on the pillows and let everything go hang. *McGinty vs. Boyle, Johnson vs. Katz*, how many days must a motion be filed and in what court, and hamburger or liver for dinner? All at once nothing mattered, and, what was even more significant, nor did anyone expect it to matter. As I settled more comfortably in bed, I had a moment of perfect clarity when I understood sympathetically, the rationale and psychology of the hypochondriac.

Then John returned. "Look, sweetie," he said hesitatingly, "should I call in Bob or someone else to look after you?"

I knew what prompted the question. Because of the emotional element involved, most doctors never treat their own families themselves. Consequently, a kind of professional courtesy exists, in that physicians treat each other's immediate families without charge, but also with a peculiar, but very human, type of reluctance about shouldering full responsibility gratuitously. In passing the diagnostic buck, a medical free-for-all ensues over the professional patient, so that as always, with too many cooks, doctors usually get the worst treatment.

"Don't call anyone in," I said firmly. "I'm not in the mood to hold open forum for all your colleagues and their high-sounding lectures. You always say that usually there isn't anything more they can do. As for sharing responsibility, that's between you and me, and you're all the doctor I want. Let me at least be sick privately."

Which was practically my last intelligent speech for days. As for privacy, I really should have known that was only a dog's privilege. Nothing in all the world is as public, as uninhibited, as free a license for open hunting, and as undignified, as being sick.

In ten minutes (they must have hired Superman for a driver) my mother and father were both in the house.

"I knew something would happen," my mother wept, standing mournfully over me so that I began to listen for a eulogy. "It must have been some exposure on that night the burglar came," she added when she could speak again.

John always marvels at the perverse kind of satisfaction it seems to give most people, if they can find something concrete to blame an illness on. Every cold has a definite, identifiable draft for a sponsor; every headache has a specific parent too, from sinus to shrimps ("I knew they were spoiled!") to lack of sleep ("The baby kept me up all night"). Indeed, there are no orphan complaints. John loves to tell about the old man of seventy, who in the final throes of a coronary thrombosis (formerly erroneously called "acute indigestion") shouted to his wife with whom he had just celebrated his golden wedding anniversary: "I'd never have gotten sick if I didn't eat the soup you made last night!"

My mother's rationale, therefore, was not surprising, and if making a scapegoat out of a harmless drunk made her happy, I would be the last to object.

"Aren't you going to take her to a hospital?" my father, being a man of efficiency, asked next.

"I won't go," I shrieked, sitting straight up in bed. Never again will I laugh at the many people who protest to the bitter end that they "will die in their own beds." Not that I thought of really dying. The greatest safeguard against such hysteria that anyone can have is a good, strong ego, like mine, which says in moments of crisis, "This can't be happening to me!" and ends by coating everything with a protective layer of unreality.

But my mother ignored me, and spoke to John as if I weren't there. "She can't stay here," she said. "Who'll take care of her here?"

"John will," I shouted, resenting this popular practice of acting as if illness deranges the mind.

"But you have your work to do," my mother said, still speaking only to John.

Effectively rebuffed, I gave up and let them fight it out alone. "Just let me get well," I prayed silently to God. "I'll never complain again, besides You know I didn't mean it."

It never occurred to me to realize that like most people in distress, I was bargaining with God. Where this racketeering spirit in religion comes from, I don't know. There is no doubting the fact, however, that sooner or later we all turn to the same black market with something like: "Make Jane better, and I'll stop playing the races," or, "Fix up my leg, and I'll never take another drink." What a wonderful, compassionate sense of humor God must have to listen, and still care!

I came out of my cathedral in time to hear Freda, who had come in as soon as she had heard I was sick, via the neighborhood grapevine, say: "I'll take care of her, if you like. I was once supposed to be a nurse, and I'd love to help Mrs. B. Besides, I'll only charge half the regular fee since I'm not an R.N., and I'll cook, too."

"Sold," I exclaimed so suddenly, that my mother wept: "She's delirious," and John ran to feel my pulse.

And from there on, we were off on a rather unconventional, but satisfying illness. I would like to be able to report that I remembered every detail, and be able to recount it like Irvin S. Cobb and his operations. Or else, I certainly would like to be able to announce that I entered the romantic kind of Hollywood fog, strictly reserved for heroines, with a dramatic "Where am I?" exit from the trance, at the end. Unfortunately, there was neither the conventional blow-by-blow description nor the respectable blank coma for me; for although chronological sequence was gone, many basic facts remained.

To begin with, John's friends at the hospital heard the news about my illness and hurried over. Each man of them behaved as if he had never heard a real pneumonia before, and insisted upon a personal examination to confirm the diagnosis. "Right here," the visiting diagnostician would say, happily pounding my chest as if it were a back door on a speakeasy.



"Let me listen," another would say, coming forward as to a symphony concert. Then after a moment he, too, would pronounce triumphantly, "That's the spot right there all right!"

Then they would discuss "the case" like museum curators over a newly discovered mummy.

"Marked pallor," one would say, making me feel like Ophelia.

"Shallow respirations," another would declare, until I began to feel it was just a matter of minutes before they'd hang the Rest-in-Peace wreath about my neck.

Finally, I said to John: "I can't stand it any more! Maybe they mean well, and maybe I wouldn't mind so much if it were my toenails they kept looking at, but as it is, I . . ."

Just then, another doctor came smiling into the doorway.

"Get him out of here," I shrieked, hiding in my bed. "Get him out."

"He's gone," John said after a brief minute, and so he had. But with him had gone the relishing information that poor Mrs. B. was so sick she was out of her head and raving. "Isn't it too bad?" everyone said gleefully in the staff room.

Next there was the business of bedpans. Bedpans are an impractical nuisance at best, and a savage invention at worst. To board one properly requires the agility of a circus contortionist, the accuracy of a crack marksman, and the persistency of John L. Lewis on strike. To dismount effectively, and with dignity, is as difficult as snake charming. Bedpans should be reserved exclusively for the moribund who can't help what they're doing, and the mentally deranged who don't know what they're doing. Perhaps as an original substitute for an outhouse in cases of fever, they were inescapable; but why any intelligent man or woman, germ or no germ, must submit to such torture when he's got a steam-heated, adjoining bath is as much a mystery to me as Babylonian cuneiform and the concentric theory of cosmos.

"I won't do it," I would yell every time Freda came in bearing the

monstrosity proudly, as if it were a holy relic reputed to have miracle powers of healing.

Then would follow a hectic sortie in which I found my slippers, dashed to the bathroom with Freda hurrying at my heels, waving the bedpan, and John, attracted by the commotion, close behind.

"Patients do exactly as I say," John protested.

"Aren't you glad I know better?" I would tease.

Freda was an unorthodox delight from start to finish. The nurse's training she referred to must have been purely in the aspirational stage, but her intentions, like Caesar's wife, were above suspicion. She did her work as if she had a *Handbook on Nursing* rolled up in her stocking for emergency consultation, and she found my common-sense lack of cooperation very disturbing, as if we were both actors in *Life Can Be Beautiful*, and I kept missing my lines.

Each morning, for instance, she wanted to change the linen. I held out for an extra day.

"We don't have enough sheets for daily changes," I said, "and soon I'll be lying on the bare mattress."

"Hospitals change every day," she replied dogmatically like a religious novice reciting the Apostle's Creed.

The battle raged good-humoredly from morning to morning, with the final score an even tie. On the days that Freda won, though, the resultant bedmaking was a Houdinian exhibition. She was supposed to be the master "now you see it, now you don't" magician, while I was assigned to the role of star trapeze artist, and was often left clinging by a single bar into empty space, without a safety net.

"I'm falling!" I would yell, and poor Freda would haul me back aboard by my nightgown. "You've pinned me under," was another S.O.S., and once, when the mad scramble was finished, we were all hilariously delighted to find that the clean sheet was on the floor in a heap, with the soiled one neatly and firmly tucked back on the bed.

"I've never seen such goings on in a sick room," my mother said

one day. She was a firm believer in the black-crepe proprieties of illness, catastrophe, and death, and found our general behavior as difficult to take as swimming in Niagara Falls.

From the traditional point of view, she had good cause to complain. Outside of my sulfa tablets, for instance, I refused to swallow any other pill, even if it were guaranteed to make hair grow on my chest and enable me to sing like Lily Pons. Not even an act of Congress would have changed my mind!

"There should be no choice," my mother protested. "If a doctor prescribes something, you take it."

"That's the usual tyranny of the sickroom," I agreed. "But you know what a struggle it is for me to swallow even a single aspirin, so I decided to take just what was necessary, and leave the trimmings for the patients."

Then she discovered that I was eating whatever I pleased. After the tea and toast and heated milk ritual that my mother had always followed for anything from hayfever to whooping cough, this sounded as outrageous as storing garbage pails in an operating room.

"But John said nothing is wrong with my stomach," I tried to reassure her. "He said he knows most people think a soft diet is necessary for any condition, but that actually I could eat anything that was tolerable to me. And this is," I finished, pointing to an ear of canned corn, a bottle of Coca-Cola, and a piece of strawberry shortcake, "tolerable to me!"

All in all, it was an adventurous session, if a little hazy in spots like an opium eater's dream, and I awoke on the sixth day feeling definitely better.

"How do you feel?" John asked anxiously as soon as his eyes were open. This question had been propounded for days with the unflinching regularity of radio station WQXR delivering the news.

"Better," I said cheerfully. Then, methodically, as if he were a charge nurse on floor duty, he took my temperature.

"Normal," he breathed, as he shook it down. "Thank God."

"You mean, I'm all better?" I asked, realizing that my usual foginess was somewhat lighter.

"Not yet," John said. "The pneumonia's beginning to resolve, though, and it won't be long now, but you'll have to rest and lie still for another week. Oh, darling, I'm so happy!" He smiled at me with proud appreciation, as if I had just been chosen Miss America.

"Was I very sick?" I asked eagerly, ready to enjoy my featured role in *Returned from the Dead*.

"Very," was the solemn reply.

For a moment of awed stillness, I paid my silent respects to this vanquished enemy. Then I continued with my curiosity.

"Were you very worried?" I asked next.

"Out of my wits," said John.

"Good," I answered cheerfully. "Was anybody else worried too?"

"You sadist," laughed John. "We all were. Haven't you heard the phone ringing and ringing? Which reminds me," he said with the anticipatory flourish of a waiter producing the French pastries at the end of a meal, "this week you can have visitors. In fact, beginning today."

It was obvious that John expected this news to be as welcome as a Sears, Roebuck catalogue in a lonely farmhouse, and at first I thought so too. But as the week progressed, and everyone and anyone I had ever known arrived to pay their tributes, I began to feel as bored as Greta Garbo with her public, and as anxious for an understudy as a prima donna.

My part in the social proceedings was merely to smile wanly at each new face to demonstrate my recent illness, and to talk amusingly the rest of the time to prove my recovery. Eventually, I could have qualified as a diplomatic hostess, with gag-writing for Fred Allen on the side.

The visitors, for their part, followed such a regular pattern that once again I was forced to reflect on the evil influence of Emily

Post. Almost everyone who came entered with some token of appreciation, and at first, I looked eagerly to see what each new arrival had brought, like a spoiled brat who demands: "Whatcha got for me today?" My enthusiasm faded with the repetitiousness of the presents. My collection eventually included masses of flowers, which, although I ordinarily love to have, depressed me with their funeral abundance; four boxes of mixed chocolates which the guests immediately proceeded to finish; and six books, two the same, but all, of course, directly from the best-seller lists.

Most of the visitors wore a very proper, sober look, like a hearse driver making a professional call. The coy ones said very originally: "Imagine a doctor's wife getting sick!" to which my regular reply was: "You ought to see the obituaries in the A.M.A." The point was plainly wasted, since to the average lay mind all deaths and illnesses are usually attributed to some doctor's delinquency, which false belief would naturally make similar consequences in a physician's family incomprehensible.

The more serious arrivals would have gruesome histories to list for comparison, and would each offer a pet version of some "Fourteen Day Palmolive Cure" which they had tried when similarly afflicted, and which would surely have cured me in twenty-four hours. Some even stopped to emulate their own particular doctors, as if I were under the care of a veterinarian or a grocery clerk. One and all, they wanted to hear the gory details from start to finish, until I felt like apologizing for not having a fancy scar to show.

"Were you in much pain?" I was hopefully asked.

"Where exactly did it hurt?"

Most of course agreed that I must have had the most devoted medical care in the world, and the most scientific—two statements I dared not dispute. I had long ago learned that most people think that when a doctor holds his wife's hand tenderly, he says, "Darling, you have a tachycardia," and that when he looks soulfully into her eyes, he comments on the inequality of her pupils. Few stop to realize that obviously such romanticism would lead to the divorce

court, or a lunatic asylum, and that the facts of life are inflexible.

By the end of this last week in bed, Saturday to be exact, although I could recall no feeling of equal importance since I was six years old and had orally removed my tonsils over and over again for the benefit of the neighborhood juvenile congregation, I was tired of the whole business.

"They wear me out," I told Freda during an unexpected lull.

"Me too," said Freda.

Throughout this convalescent period, she was also helping John in the office during his regular hours, and the only grains of amusement I found during those tiresome days were her riotous stories of local gossip and funny incidents in practice. That afternoon she had a good one.

"This feller came in," she said, "and doc asked him if he had brought along the early morning urine specimen he'd asked for. 'Give me a bottle and I'll give it to you,' said the man, 'I haven't done it yet.' And this," roared Freda, "was afternoon.

"So," she continued, "I gave him the bottle and he went into the treatment room. Suddenly he yells out: 'Say, doc, I filled your bottle. But hurry up, and tell me quick, where'll I put the rest?'"

As I laughed with Freda over her story, I felt a sudden pang of homesickness for the wonderful way of life John and I had followed. I wanted it back again, I wanted to be with him, working and sharing and planning. All at once, my illness and my bed were like being far, far away from everything in a kind of prison.

That night, John and I were alone for what seemed like the first time in years. Freda had gone home, and blissfully, no one else had come.

"Must be out having a gala time," John said, explaining the unusual peace.

"Probably," I agreed. "But I like it here. Just us." I spoke with a new depth of sincerity. Maybe being sick is never a pleasant or a chosen occupation, but it has an effective way of stripping us bare of all but the essentials, and leaving a wealth of maturity and under-

standing in its wake. "I know what counts now," I told John earnestly. "Not a place to go, or a thing to do, but us."

"I've always known," he said, holding me close. "Oh darling, I've missed you so."

"I know," I said, because in a way it was really as if I had been off on a distant trip and had not come back again until now.

"Don't ever leave me alone like this again," John whispered, sharing my feeling of a finished journey. "I need you so, my own, beautiful darling!"

And as I contentedly listened, I caught a glimpse of myself in the dresser mirror directly opposite my bed, with the huge, ugly, purplish sulfa rash on my face, and the straightened, messy hair hanging wildly about my head, and the emaciated-looking, skeletal arms at my sides. "This," I thought, finally convinced beyond any reasonable doubt as he spoke, "surely this must be love."

CHAPTER TEN



The End of an Era

*Oh promise me that some day you and I
Will find again the time to sit and sigh,
Where we can be alone and faith renew,
Away from all the things that now we do:
The dishes, and the pots; the bells that ring,
The patients, and the pills, and everything
That speak no more of wondrous love to be,
Oh promise me, oh promise me!*

—with apologies

Sociologists have long been attempting to fix the exact moment when the honeymoon ends and the basic marriage begins. Anything from the first quarrel to the first unknissed farewell have been offered as precision points, but from personal experience, I would like to suggest the first baby. From the very start of its expected arrival, nature, with the finesse of a Forty-Second Street subway platform guard during rush hours, has an uncanny, unerring way of turning a nice, romantic couple into a pair of serviceable parents.

Our own metamorphosis began soon after my illness. The few weeks immediately following my recovery were the last, blissfully quiet days John and I were ever again to know. At first, of course, my

mother was determined upon sending me off to convalesce in some isolated countryside.

"But I want to stay home," I insisted loudly, realizing, as she muttered about my "pigheadedness," that the true test of stubbornness can only be administered by an equally stubborn individual. "Look," I pleaded, trying to make it sound like a geometric theorem: "I promise to do nothing but eat, sleep, and rest. Freda has agreed to look after everything until I'm fully recovered. Won't that do it? And just think, that way, I won't have to leave John alone either."

"Nonsense!" said my mother, making my proposition seem as ridiculous as if I had suggested sending Mae West to a Franciscan monastery. "People have to go away to recuperate. As for leaving John, lots of couples do that sort of thing. In fact the modern advisers all encourage husbands and wives to get away from each other for some part of the year, vacationing or otherwise."

John, who was sitting near by, smiled, and I started to laugh. That decrepit discussion about separate holidays for young couples, was like most of the marital counselor bosh. "If it's so bad that they need a rest from each other in the first place," John would say, "why then time off alone will only convince them how much happier they are apart; and if it's not bad at all, and they'll only miss each other, then certainly the senseless separation is a meaningless form of abstinence."

"That's right," I would agree. "Rules in marriage are quite absurd. Maybe you can reupholster an old sofa from a set of printed directions, but in marriage, it's more than what you do, it's how you feel, and emotions don't follow blueprints, do they?"

Now, for my mother's sake, I tried to explain how John and I felt, but it was like talking sign language to a blind porcupine.

"Never mind," was her final response. "I understand completely. You mean to stay home. Very well. I won't say another word. *I'm* not one to interfere."

Despite her forebodings, however, the next two weeks were like

the softened, silvered sweetness in the winter air before a heavy snow. I lounged comfortably, ate prodigiously, and slept with the soundness of a hypnotized subject in suspended animation. Whenever John could spare the time, we drove to the park and walked along the deserted trails, basking in the cold sunlight, and talking endlessly like a pair of repatriated Frenchmen. Looking nostalgically back, it all seems very much like the condemned prisoner's last, grandiose bill of fare before the execution, for it was during this interlude that we determined on Lizzie.

"I feel wonderful," I told Freda one day, as I sat munching a celery stalk while she cooked dinner. "I am not only the laziest thing in creation, but I have the solid approval of the whole world in pursuing this course."

"You might as well make the most of it," said Freda cheerfully. "Another few days, and you'll be back at this," she pointed to the chicken in the pan, "and school, and everything. And after that, you'll probably start tying yourself down with a family, and that's for keeps."

"A family!" I repeated to John that night, making it sound as if she had advocated our joining a nudist colony. "I never even thought of that."

"Neither did I," he confessed.

And so we started to think.

Poor Lizzie! We treated her like a proposed new hatrack for the guest closet. To have or not to have, how much, when, why, and how? With the filibustering art of an opposition party debate, we employed full parliamentary procedure in arriving at our foregone conclusion. John knew all the easy ones, and I was just his "feed man," like Jack Benny's Rochester: Did we want children? Of course! Sometime. Even I knew the line about the patter of little feet and the empty home. Was it expensive? How could it be?

The hospital would give us a discount, and (this was John's) how much milk could a little baby drink? Well then, should we wait? For what? It still takes nine months (heh heh!); and (three cheers

for the red, white, and blue on this one!), if you have your children while you're young, you both grow up together, you are like brothers, friends, et cetera. In the final balloting, the motion was unanimously carried.

"But school," I remembered, just before I fell asleep, "Oh John, I can't have a baby while I'm still there!"

"That's all right," John said promptly. "You're finishing your law course in three months, and it won't begin to show until much later on."

"Oh," I said, reassured, as if a pot belly was the sum total of pregnancy and is casually shed in season like winter woollies.

My deeper thoughts came the next day, but even these were not profound enough to really disturb me. "Who wants to grow up with children?" I thought. Certainly, children prefer parents who keep their place. The general competitive spirit is bad enough for youngsters, and while the sister act between mother and daughter may flatter Mama no end, I bet Janie, if she could, would probably trade mother in for a more conventional model. "And what about morning sickness?" I wondered next. Hadn't I heard something about that?

But the die was inevitably cast. In a short while, we discovered that we were definitely "expecting" and so took the first step out of the honeymoon stage without the slightest realization of what was taking place.

"How come husbands in the movies never seem to know beforehand?" I asked John, as he consulted the calendar for me. "She faints, or drops a little bootee that she's knitting, and he acts as flabbergasted as if he were never even there!"

John laughed. "Maybe they've had a sterility problem," he joked, "and so he's shocked at what he's finally done. Or maybe Samuel Goldwyn likes it that way. I don't know."

"Sterility for all of them?" I giggled. "Not in literature. Some of the most famous heroines in fiction needed only one little slip, and they pay and pay. You'd think authors never heard of sterility."

Then I grew more serious, and said: "About us, John, let's not tell anyone yet for a while. At school, I'd never live it down, and at home, I guess I'd feel funny if everyone knew. What are you laughing at now?"

It was a few minutes before John calmed down to explain. "You remind me of Mrs. Brooks," he said. "She's nineteen and only married a few months. The other day when she came in, and I told her and her husband that Junior was coming, she got all red in the face, a terrific blush, and said to Mr. Brooks: 'Oh honey, I'm so embarrassed. Now everyone will know what we were doing!'"

Although I joined in his laughter, I still was firm about not revealing the news until after my diploma was secured, and John finally agreed. Despite his personal excitement, however, his professional attitude was the same annoyingly consistent one as ever. First he decided that he would look after me prenatally, and call in Bob at the end only for the actual delivery, since it was considered unethical for a physician to deliver his own wife. Then, with the practical arrangements thus rapidly completed, he delegated the whole business of having a baby to the unimpressive cubby hole reserved for prosaic, routine cases in medical practice.

"Pregnancy is a perfectly natural function," he began, like a second grader reciting the pledge to the flag. "The most important thing to remember is to forget the entire matter." This conclusion was offered like an obstetrician on a platform addressing a class for expectant mothers.

And "forget it" was exactly what John proceeded to do. When I developed spells of nausea, and complained because I had to sneak out of the lecture hall at school to a deserted bathroom, he merely said with his usual exasperating nonchalance toward nondangerous, uncomfortable symptoms: "Morning sickness is common enough, and of no significance at all. Don't worry."

On the other hand, if I developed the slightest cramp, he became frantic in his surety that I was starting a miscarriage. The resultant tension so unnerved both of us, that finally even John said: "Let's

stop thinking of babies. Most disturbances in pregnancy have a psychological origin anyway, because of the woman's mental reaction to her condition. Let's keep busy elsewhere."

Keeping busy was no trick at all, at that time, or any time since. I was back in the office by then, helping John, and reaping my full share of engrossment and laughter. If distraction was what John prescribed, then his practice was the ideal place to get it. How long could a backache last when measured against the humor of a boy who telephoned to ask: "Please miss, the doctor asked for a twenty-four hour urine specimen, and its nineteen hours now, but gosh, I can't hold out any longer! What should I do?"

How could morning sickness hold out against a man like Mr. Jones? Tony Jones came into the office looking like a Buchenwald survivor: thin, droopy, exhausted. "I'm a wreck, Doc," he said. "I don't have the strength of a baby. Me and the missus, all night, night after night! I tell you I'm a wreck!"

"Lord, man, are you trying to kill yourself?" asked John indignantly. "Why do you do it?"

"I tell you Doc," said poor Tony Jones, already the harassed father of five. "I don't go to shows; I don't drink; I don't go to night clubs; I don't have much money; I work hard. What other pleasure do I have in life?"

Besides keeping busy in the office, I found myself flung into the final throes of cramming at school. The effort of covering the whole year's law work in preparation for the concluding examinations, as well as the state bar, was no negligible matter.

"Thank God that's all over!" I told John one day after the last paper had been handed in, and I came home from school for the last time.

"Think you passed?" asked John, as I fell wearily on the couch.

"I prayed hard enough," I answered confidently, as if prayer could alter the facts of how much two plus two make, or what Justice Marshall said over a hundred years ago.

"When's graduation?" he asked, equally confident.

"Why, got something for me?" I spoke with renewed interest.

John's face fell twenty points. "Gifts again!" he groaned. "I clean forgot. Don't worry, though, now I'll remember. I tell you though, sweetie," he went on half-jokingly, "the Bible says Jacob served seven years for Rachel, but sometimes I think that modern man never finishes serving."

"It never used to be such a horrible job for you when we were engaged, and first married," I answered, trying to joke back, but not succeeding very well. "You used to get me loads of things then."

"That's just it," said John. "A fellow kind of runs out of ideas. Besides, I've got a lot more on my mind now."

"Well anyway," I said, deliberately turning away from this Scylla and Charybdis topic, "you'd better wait and see how I make out."

I made out pretty well, all things considered, and on graduation morning I set out proudly for the commencement exercises with John, my mother and my father, and Lizzie too, as John likes to say, although I hope there was no prenatal influence. The ceremony was the usual variety, the hired caps and gowns as musty as ever, and the graduates (myself included), demonstrated their customary boredom and superiority to the lengthy addresses by playing tic-tac-toe on their laps.

After the ordinary hectic farewells and vows of eternal friendship had been freely exchanged with even some classmates I had never spoken to before, my family party drove down in my father's car to lunch at one of those thrillingly expensive restaurants, where the menu actually reads like the financial budget of a foreign republic. In these vestigial establishments, whose sole *raison d'être* is perhaps to cater to groups like ours where celebration rather than digestion is the primary consideration, tiny potatoes are presented individually as if they were gold nuggets; meat is offered to anyone less famous than Governor Dewey, on a ration card basis; and the service is as elegantly protracted as an inaugural procession to Chopin's *Funeral March*.

On the way home my mother said, "I'd be a lot more excited

about your being a lawyer, if you were unmarried like the others in your class. Tell me, dear, what do you plan doing now?"

"Sleep," I replied immediately. "I'm going to sleep until twelve o'clock every day to make up for the years of jumping out of bed and rushing out. Then I'll make my place in the world."

This worthy ambition lasted only one week, after which time the full significance of my graduation made itself felt.

"I can't believe that I'll never go back to school again, that a whole part of my life is over," I told John thoughtfully one morning. "Of course, I feel a lot freer now, but also a little lost. It makes me seem older somehow, and kind of peculiar."

"That's how I felt too," said John, adjusting his necktie, "but you'll get over it. In fact, now I believe that Life Begins at Graduation."

The shadow of change came over me then for the first time, and I experienced a subconscious reluctance about leaving the comfortable familiarity, and moving ahead. But I deliberately ignored it all.

My busyness did not end with law school either. First, there was our annual anniversary which came next.

"A whole year!" we would exclaim whenever there was a respectful pause during the day. "Incredible!"

John bought me a complete set of legal stationery, beautifully engraved with "Counselor-at-Law."

"That's me!" I said happily, running my finger excitedly over the raised lettering and feeling more convinced and proud than when the Dean had given me my real diploma.

I gave John a "genuwine" leather wallet (the storekeeper's best), as a symbol of our increased prosperity, and that night we had a big party at home to commemorate what Bob in his initial toast called, "The founding of the B. Republic."

"Dynasty would be more like it," I giggled, unable to resist the perfect opening. "In six months."

There was a moment's silence for station identification, while they pondered my complicated announcement.

"Well, what do you know!" gasped Bob.

"A baby!" exclaimed Agnes, as if she were solving a prize crossword puzzle, and had just hit the missing four letter key word, top row across.

"Congratulations!" said Gert Shaw, for once too startled for profanity.

Everyone else seemed strangely touched, as if I had announced that John and I were going to try to set an endurance record in swimming the English Channel.

"We've got news too," Bob said, after the first wave of well-wishing had diminished.

"Yes," said Agnes, "we're getting married at Christmas, and you'll all be invited."

There was another hubbub for this, in which I worried about how I would attend at that late date with my belly, while Janet Grayson wanted to know if it would be formal, and Gert Shaw loudly toasted the "God-damned lucky stiffs!"

"Yes, sir," said Bob importantly. "It worked out fine for John not to wait until he was completely finished at the hospital, so we're doing it too."

"What a party!" said John, when the last guest left.

"Nice," I agreed. "Anyway, the news is out now, and tomorrow, I'll tell my mother."

This was a heroic job, and I had to keep twisting my wedding ring on my finger, to convince myself that there was nothing immoral, at least. My mother, when she heard me out, was torn between the inherent pleasure of a prospective grandmother, and the apparent worry and consequent displeasure of a mother.

"I did think you would wait," she said, sniffing a little. "You're so young."

"You were even younger when your first was born," I reminded her.

"Well, it's different now. And you're just out of school," she answered. "Still it's your life, I guess," she finished, handing it

reluctantly over. But she was excited too, and in a few days had circulated the news all over town like a special edition of a local paper.

Only Freda was not surprised. "I figured it was next on the schedule," she laughed, "especially when your dresses all seemed so tight in the waist. Oh, yes they did," she insisted as I protested. "Anyway," she continued, "you and doc are married over a year already, so you're not newlyweds any more either."

"Not newlyweds?" I thought resentfully. And yet it was true. The pattern of our lives was not the hesitating, inexperienced affair it had been at the beginning. Practice was comfortably, if not luxuriously, established, and there was a surety about our decisions and movements that had certainly not been present twelve months before. Even having a baby was the mark of mature responsibility, yet I hated to admit the change.

"Why don't you take some law work?" John asked, misinterpreting my moodiness, and prescribing his usual activity cure-all. My diploma was framed and hanging in his office, along with the enlarged photograph of me in full graduation regalia, which he fondly called "Mother and Child." "It'll do you good to keep busy, especially with school behind you," he added. "I've always noticed that the women who hold on to a job as long as possible have the least complaints, and are the happiest."

"I have got my pretty stationery," I said thoughtfully, looking upon this equipment of my trade like feathers to a fan dancer. "But I don't have any clients," I went on doubtfully, "and I've never clerked for another attorney. The closest I've come to a court so far has been at the swearing-in ceremonies after I passed my bar exams. How can I just take legal work?"

"That's easy," John replied, and I knew he had already gone over the matter in his own mind. "A number of patients have noticed your diploma, and when I tell them you're a lawyer, they ask if you'd handle something for them. So far, I've stalled them, but if you're willing. . ."

"Willing!" I jumped up enthusiastically, completely forgetting my former wrestling with the problems of old age and life. "Who's first?"

"Mrs. Adams," John was excited too. "She's gotten hold of some baby, and she and her husband want to adopt it. I'll tell them to come over tomorrow night."

The next night I changed my dress four times in an effort to look more like Portia facing life, and I practiced saying "ahem" in a professional voice, like the professors at law school, in a valiant attempt to sound like Justice Cardozo delivering an historical dictum. While I was still rehearsing, the bell rang, and this time, in a reversal of roles, I hid in the office while John answered the door.

Feeling like an understudy suddenly called to the stage, I conquered my mike fright, and said to the young couple after an appropriate interval: "Won't you come in?"

This didn't exactly bring down the house. They came in and stood awkwardly beside me.

"Ahem," I asked next, "won't you sit down?"

They sat. I wasn't quite sure how friendly a lawyer is supposed to get with his clients, and the only saving feature was that Mr. and Mrs. Adams didn't know either. After a brief uncomfortable pause, I asked them, à la John, in my desperation: "And what's the trouble?"

That aroused them. "No trouble," they answered in alarm. "We just want to adopt a baby."

"Fine, fine," I boomed, trying to sound professional, but my hearty response came as a surprise to all of us. "And now let's see."

I went into all the pertinent details I could think of about the parentage of the child, its age, history, et cetera, et cetera.

Then Mrs. Adams timidly asked: "How much will that cost?"

That line wasn't in my script; and, my experience with legal fee schedules being nonexistent, I could sooner have worked out the cube root of the logarithm of my telephone number backward,

than have answered that simple, logical question. It had never seemed possible before that anyone would actually be willing to pay for my humble services.

"Oh yes, my fee," I said to Mr. Adams, hedging like a lingering bellhop for a tip. "My fee."

Was it \$10 or \$50 or a \$100? Finally, I said, "Be with you in a moment," and ran out.

"John," I asked, as we held an emergency conference in the kitchen, "what'll I do?"

He had a remarkable suggestion. "Can't you call Frank Morrison who used to be in your class?" he asked. "He's been a legal apprentice for years, hasn't he?"

"Of course," I exclaimed, "he'll know the rate!"

I dialed Frank's number hurriedly, and explained my predicament. "Well," said Frank, sounding as suave as a veteran ambulance chaser, "the main price is whatever the traffic will bear. But since you're new at the game, you'd better settle for a moderate fee," and he named a reasonable figure.

"Thanks loads," I said in farewell, and hung up, feeling as if I had just been awarded a refrigerator and a television radio set on "Winner Takes All." Then I rushed back to the Adamses, where, after a few preliminary remarks and much impressive paper shuffling, I named my fee.

"Fair enough," said Mr. Adams, and after a few more comments we closed the deal.

"My first client!" I gloated silently, as we all stood up to shake hands. At the door, Mrs. Adams paused.

"Dear," she said to her husband, "I think you should tell her."

"Don't have to," he replied.

"But maybe it matters," she persisted.

"Why don't you tell me and let me decide?" I interrupted, unable to comprehend this hesitation.

"All right," agreed Mr. Adams, as if he were about to announce

the weather forecast. "It's like this: My wife and me, well, we're not really married, because my first wife won't give me a divorce. That's all."

"All!" I told John afterwards. "They can no more adopt children legally, than they can produce legitimate ones of their own. As if any judge would condone such immorality by calling them 'fit parents.'"

"Maybe the next case that turns up will be better," John said encouragingly, when he finished laughing.

But the next case was just as bad. The very next day a Mrs. Pritchett came in with her eight-year-old-son, Percival, demanding to see me.

"I've got rights," she bellowed before I could even question her. "Imagine a hit-and-run driver knocking down my Percival! I'll sue him! I got his license number all right, before I picked Percy up. My poor Percy!"

While she was blowing her nose, I started on Percy. He was playing ball, he told me, only partially coherent, and he ran into the gutter after his ball, when the car came.

"Almost killed him," Mrs. Pritchett wailed at this point.

"Did it hit you?" I asked the surprisingly healthy looking child, who resembled a fullback for Notre Dame rather than an accident victim.

"Almost," said Percy importantly.

"Fool!" shouted Mrs. Pritchett clubbing him over the head with her handbag. "I told you it hit you hard on your head!"

"This is almost as bad as starting a medical practice," I told John that night. "Only, thank heaven, we don't have to count on it for our living expenses, or else it might not be so easy to turn down these phonies."

But the next case that I got was a wonderful, real taste of unadulterated law.

A Mrs. Slater, fifty, gray haired, and respectable, came in to see John, practically in nervous collapse. It appeared that her husband

had had her arrested for stealing some of his personal property, and the case was coming up next week.

"He said he would get even with me for leaving him," she sobbed, looking as much like a thief as Sister Kenny or a Salvation Army colonel. "Oh, doctor, what will I do?"

John was diplomatic. "Have you a lawyer?" he asked.

"No," she answered, "but Mrs. Ryan told me that your wife was an attorney. I can't pay much, but would she take the case for me?"

Would I? At the exact moment of acceptance, I was the spirit of Justice herself, scales, blindfold, and all; and Mrs. Slater went home with the happy assurance that the new criminology wizard, none other than the famous Mrs. B. herself, would rescue her from the dragons at the hearing next week. Then I sat down and tried to figure out just how I would accomplish this amazing feat.

A telephone call to Frank Morrison again netted me some information, and drew forth this apt remark: "Say, that's not a bad setup you and your husband have there! Want a partner?"

Then I prepared the case itself as if I had been retained to defend Claire Boothe Luce in an ax murder. I wrote out all my points, listed the pros and cons, went over all my evidence (a sister who had heard the original threat, a son-in-law who had witnessed the stolen items in the accuser's trunk after the date of the supposed robbery, and three cooperative neighbors who were ready to swear to Mrs. Slater's husband's usual cruelty and eccentricity or anything), and last, I recited my entire case from beginning to end for John, who was supposed to interrupt like a doubtful judge, and cross-examine like a hungry district attorney.

The night before the trial I scarcely slept and kept poor John awake imaging the worst. I showed up in court the next morning in my most imposing clothes (on which the skirt zipper under the jacket no longer closed). Fortunately, for all of us, with the witnesses I had, Mrs. Slater stood as much chance of being convicted as a Perry Mason protégé, and everything ended happily.

"But never again!" I swore to John in the two days I took to recuperate. "Criminal law is too upsetting for me. In any other kind of case, the worst that happens is that your client loses money. In this work, somebody actually goes to jail. That's terrible."

As time gradually passed, however, I found that I had acquired a middle-sized group of faithful clients, and I spent many pleasant afternoons drawing up wills and contracts, starting one divorce case, one separation case, and suing four insurance companies in accident cases. I even began methodically to send letters on my majestic legal stationery to some of John's delinquent debtors.

"It's no use," John said, when I began this. "You know what it's like getting patients to pay."

I knew. The reluctance to part with any amount of money at all for medical services was as deeply ingrained as the instinct to evade income tax. It was John's contention that no grocer would ever deign to tolerate the dead bills that any doctor habitually carries, and he ventured to wonder if a free loaf of bread or a can of tomato juice with each visit, might not produce better financial results.

Nevertheless, I wrote my letters, and we were both astounded to discover in many pleasing instances, that the threat of the mighty hands of the law, in the form of the bold Counselor-at-Law on my stationery, was as effective in producing results as a storm trooper's former triumphant missions.

Eventually, as my size continued to increase, my legal activities became necessarily curtailed.

"Look how big I'm getting," I told John one night as we prepared for bed.

"Perfectly natural," was the disinterested reply, which made me feel as important as a fifth leg on a chair.

"Say, look here," I said, with mounting annoyance, "you're supposed to be looking after me, and you never do."

John slowly removed another shoe before replying. "When did I take your blood pressure last?" he asked, wriggling his toes.

"Six weeks ago," I said indignantly.

"All right," he said. "Just a minute."

He went into the office, and came back and took my blood pressure, as I sat up in bed.

"Is that all?" I asked.

"Sure," he said. "You're feeling well, aren't you? You take your own weight from time to time, and know enough to keep it down. So that's all."

"But I don't understand," I protested. "In practice, the women come in regularly every two or three weeks, carrying their little specimen bottles as if they were bearing sacrifices to the heathen God of Fertility."

"Look sweetie," said John, stifling a yawn, "can I help it if the average woman today expects a workout with everything but a crystal ball? Doctors all give them what they want, and since it can't hurt them either, I'm not going to start a crusade for re-education. I do everything for you that's necessary. A normal prenatal course is nothing more to get excited about than a wart on the end of your finger. See?"

There was nothing more to say, so I went to sleep. My ego did not suffer greatly, however, because basically the whole business seemed quite unreal, and I watched my own progress with the unshakable, subconscious conviction that it was all happening to somebody else. Of course, since the protrusion was actually attached to me, most women, in the office and out, would take one look and launch into a descriptive account in technicolor, of their own pregnancies, with the pride of a battle-scarred, primitive Indian showing his scalps.

The gory details I heard were more than a little frightening. It didn't really help much to go through the old "My mother had babies, my grandmother had babies, and that's how everyone else came here too" routine. Nor was John's professional "natural function" idea any consolation either. The fear persisted, like a stubborn stain, and in desperation I borrowed John's textbook on obstetrics and read it through from cover to cover. Natural function indeed! After wading through the hideous obstetrical complications listed

by Dr. De Lee, I was ready to order a tombstone, and chloroform myself with the first pain. As for the gruesome illustrations, I turned away with the nauseated conviction that if those pictures were ever made more public, it would result in race suicide.

In a final demoralizing step, I took to the panacean, "happily ever after" articles in the popular ladies' magazines, like a dope addict returning to his opium; which treatises although thoroughly berated by John and his colleagues, reaffirmed my confidence in the outcome.

It was about this time, too, that I was even invited to join a few of the neighborhood clubs in some remote ways connected with motherhood. But I refused.

The universal urge for most individuals to unite in some sort of group organization is as fundamentally human as three meals a day. Originally, I presume, most clubs were formed for the promotion of happiness among the memberships, but the modern function is definitely to encourage unhappiness, and foster envy among the nonmembers. The excuse to found such an institution need not be very great. From "The Mothers of Left Handed Children's Social" and "The Organization of Bigot Falls for the Promotion of Home Cooking," (always spelled with capitals, and called in brief the O.B.F.P.H.C.), to the "Write Your Congressman Now Club" and the "League for Bigger and Stronger Diapers," there is a chartered organization in the United States of America, complete with password, slogan, and by-laws, functioning for almost every "ism," "itis," and notion in the world.

I am always surprised also to realize that the basic structures of these groups do not vary tremendously from the similar gatherings held in my childhood. The officers, always solemnly elected over the dead bodies and bloody bickerings of our major ten-year-old clique members, were respectfully addressed as "Most Worshipful"; our name was J.U.G., the meaning of which we were under witnessed Bible oath never to reveal to a living soul, although such restraint was heroic in view of the pride we all felt in this remarkable



abbreviation of an inspired title, "Just Us Girls"; we approached the meeting house in sign language, had a constitution that read like an illiterate version of the Articles of Confederation, and performed a tribal handshake that was downright jujitsu; we swore allegiance to our regulations at every session with the intensity of Ku Klux Klanners before a burning cross, and with as much intelligence; and we wore our tiny symbolic emblems (two closed safety pins to the unenlightened) like Legionnaires wear their hats in a Fifth Avenue parade, while our souls were filled with a genuine sympathy and barely disguised contempt for the lesser mortals who were forced to endure life unprivileged, unrecognized, and unhonored by the J.U.G.

Even John, who had often expressed a desire to join one of the national fraternities on a social basis, retreated in dismay before the ritual religiously imposed upon all members, particularly newcomers.

"Good God," he exclaimed after one or two tries, "maybe in short pants it would be partially comprehensible, but for grown-up, educated men to dress up in Halloween costumes, and submit to first, second, and third degrees as if they were college freshmen, is something beyond me. Why last time I almost had to spend the night outside the meetinghouse because Harry Jenkins, who only knows me almost as long as you do, darling, wouldn't dare let me in without the password. Then I was almost thrown out because I forgot to shake hands upside down, and when I finally did get inside, it was just in time to see one of the worthy applicants who was being hazed, fracture his shoulder in the cause. That's when I came on home."

When I discovered that my refusal to join the local comrades was received as indignantly as if I had slighted each chapter individually, and had implied that Mephistopheles was their presiding chairman, I hastily attributed it to my "condition." This, being the magic international password, was more graciously accepted, and even, occasionally, praised.

In December, when I entered the ninth month, I began to make excited preparations for the Bob-Agnes nuptials.

"Of course you'll go," Agnes insisted, when I hesitated at first on account of my enlarged appearance. "Probably if it hadn't been for you and John, I wouldn't have hooked my fish yet, anyway."

"Sure," said Bob, "it was contagious. Bring the baby too. We don't mind."

"Well, then," I told John as we shopped for a dress, "I'll stay in a corner like the fat lady in the circus. But at least, I'd like to look pretty from the face up." I should have realized that the only way to accomplish that would be to wear a folding screen below. Personally, I must confess that whenever I see a very pregnant lady going by, my eyes stare in a hypnotic fascination at her belly, as if she were nothing but an abdomen on stilts.

"Maybe you won't even be able to go to the wedding," my mother reminded me. "You might have the baby before."

"That's funny," I said, a little amused. "I'm so used to this bump of mine, I forget it's going to come off. It feels like a permanent fixture, sort of a sudden gain in weight."

But my mother didn't even smile. "You don't seem to realize that this is a serious business, this having a baby," she said. "For instance, have you ever stopped to think that your apartment is too small? This place was fine for newlyweds, but not for raising a family. Sure you can fit a crib into your bedroom by rearranging your furniture, but before long, mark my words, you'll definitely have to move."

"Move from here?" I asked John, when she left. I had already stopped working in the office because everyone there had begun to look at me as if I were an electric sandwich-sign man on parade. But now the thought of moving was even worse. I looked lovingly at the ladies on my wallpaper who were still holding houses in their hands; and at the peculiarly tinted walls. I walked slowly into the living room as if to make sure John's famous canopied bookshelves were still around.

"I know how it feels," John said, following me. "Remember the fun we had putting this place together? This was our beginning, a wonderful beginning, but we've come a long way, and now it's time for a new era to take its place. That's life."

The long-banished feeling of change and insecurity came over me again.

"It was all so nice, so perfect," I said sadly. "And now it'll all be different."

"Of course different," said John, holding me as close as Lizzie would allow, "but better."

It was not until the next week, at Bob's wedding, though, that I finally knew beyond all doubt that an era had really ended for John and me. It was a tremendous affair, held in Agnes' surprisingly magnificent house, which was large enough to hold a D.A.R. convention. There was a real, live butler floating about, which was enough in itself to awe the entire hospital crowd as they stood in a private section by themselves, and held an impromptu author-meets-critic review.

"Bob's done God-damned well for himself," said Gert Shaw, the first critic.

"Sh!" said her husband warningly.

"What a layout!" breathed Janet Grayson.

"Like the Roxy's ladies' room," I suggested.

"Maybe this is what lured our confirmed bachelor away," offered the hospital bachelor, old Dr. Kreutzman.

"Of course not," said John indignantly. "Bob's not that sort. Although, naturally," he added with a big grin to disguise the fact that he too was impressed, "that stuff does help."

During the ceremony, John and I sat close together, as did most of the other couples present. There is something about a ministerial voice intoning the marriage service that is overwhelmingly conducive to hand-holding.

"Would you marry me again, if you had a choice?" I whispered to John.

"Over and over again," he said earnestly, pressing my fingers.

"So would I," was my wholehearted response.

It was as Bob and Agnes came down the improvised aisle, that the feeling of passed glory overcame me again. Bob's face had an excited, embarrassed expression on it, and Agnes' seemed dreamy and unsure and prayerful. There was much giggling and blushing and kissing. Agnes kept tasting the flavor of Mrs. Abbot over and over again, and the whole house was filled with the usual wedding atmosphere of joyous celebration for the present, and fearful hopes for the future.

"Doesn't this make you feel like an old, staid, married man?" I asked John.

"In a way," he said, "but I like it. We've got something together that they still have to work hard for—and I don't mean material things."

"Maybe," I said doubtfully, preparing to leave.

That night we went to bed early, since I was unusually tired, but I couldn't sleep. I knew that what we had was better: the harmonious pattern instead of the fumbling, the depth of feeling instead of the shallow excitement, the assured closeness instead of the groping. It was just that the adventure seemed all over, and the monotony begun.

Suddenly, as I lay thinking, I felt the very first pain, and realized at once why everyone had laughed when I asked: "How will I know when I'm in labor?"

"John." At my slightest touch he sprang awake as if a tornado had struck him. "I've started. Just now."

"Darling," he said, with a horrified expression. Then he jumped out of bed without the slightest remnant of his professional poise. "Got to get to the hospital," he muttered, struggling with his pajama buttons as if they were Grand Canyon boulders he was trying to push through the holes. "Hear all kinds of stories about babies born in taxis. Bad. Very bad. Exposure."

"Taxi?" I repeated, looking at him as if he were suddenly growing horns and tusks on his head. "We've got a car. And why hurry? You said first babies take hours in coming."

When I came out of the next pain, he was hanging onto my hand, and actually shivering.

"It's c-cold in here," he explained. "The s-steam is of-off."

"For heaven's sake get back in bed and warm up," I groaned.

"Just ex-excited," he apologized under the covers.

"Me too," I said, giggling nervously, and suddenly aware of the wonderful feeling of anticipation all through me, of the heady sense of uncharted adventure. How could I have thought of monotony and apathetic days? This was no dreary ending, but a glorious new start; this was everything!

"We'd better go," said John finally. "How do you feel?"

"Fine in between pains." Then I said, putting it into words for the first time: "Are you really warmed up? Remember now, my baby's got to have a healthy father."

"Let's go," he answered, like a paratrooper taking off from a plane; and in a frenzied confusion we dressed, summoned Freda who had promised to answer our telephone for us whenever we would have to go to the hospital, and started for the car.

"Your bag," shouted Freda, bringing it out. "You forgot it!" She lugged the suitcase I had packed, only about six months before, into the car.

"Oh my God!" yelled John, as he stepped on the starter. "I clean forgot. I'd better call Grayson to deliver you. Bob's gone off on his honeymoon!"

"Honeymoon!" I scoffed, as the car sped adventurously through the cold, still, wintry night. "What's that!"

I waited for another pain before continuing.

"Honeymoons are bosh. *This* is really being married!" I finally finished.

But in the depths of the next pain, I swear I heard a little gremlin

voice say: "That's what you think now! Lady, you're never really married until you've got a house with a broken boiler, a stove without a flame, a baby in your arms, another in your hair, a husband that's belligerently hungry, and not a bite of food in the house for dinner!"

